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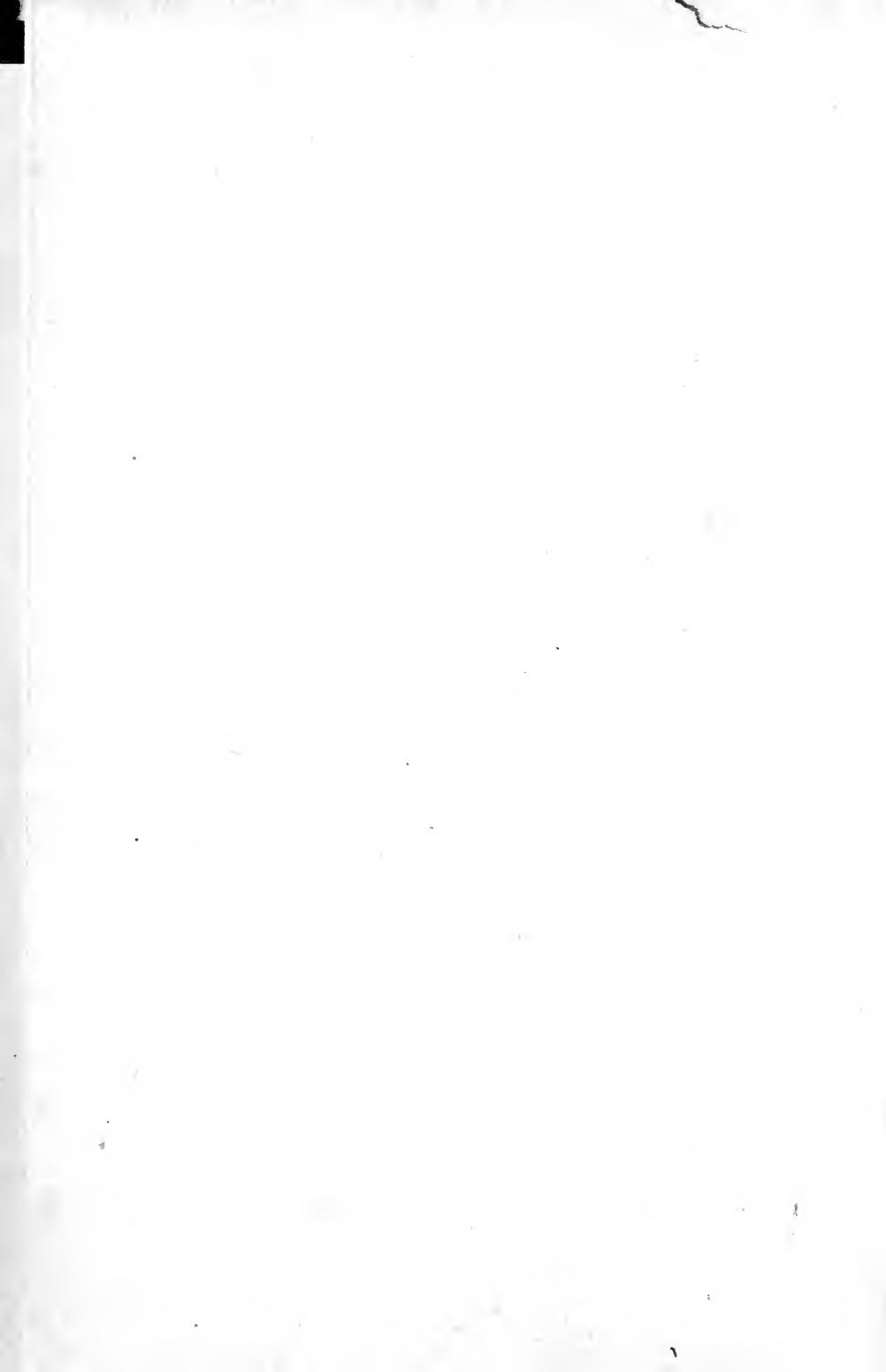
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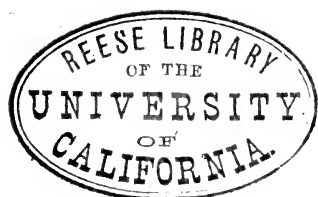
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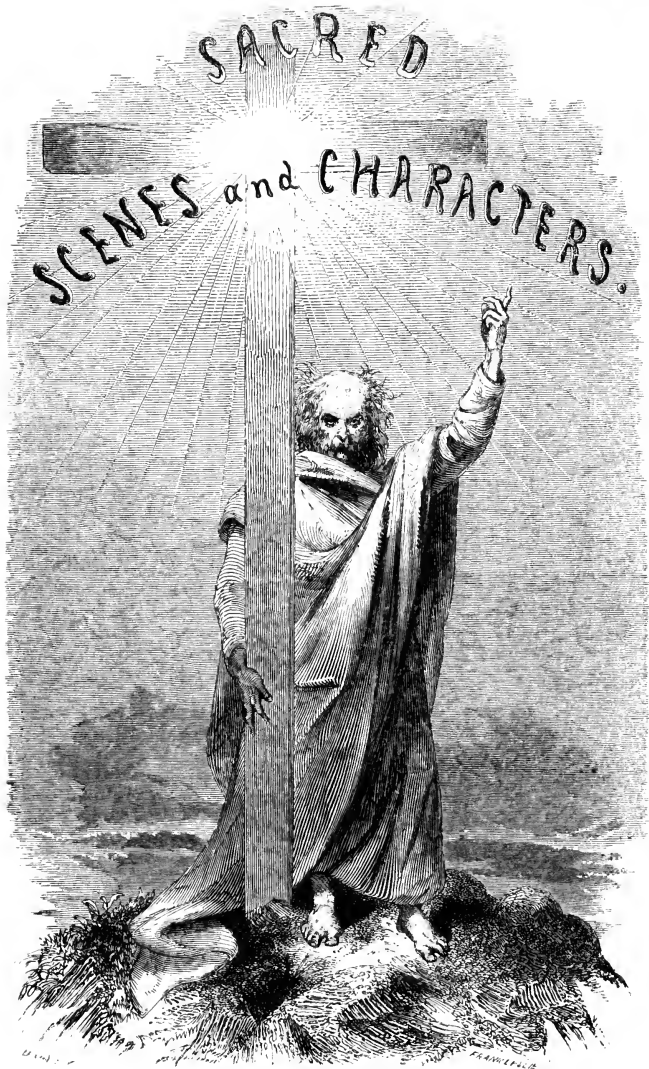






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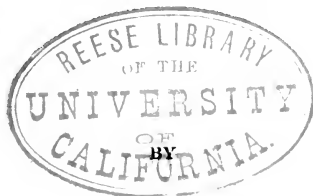




SACRED SCENES

AND

CHARACTERS.



J. T. HEADLEY,
AUTHOR OF "SACRED MOUNTAINS," ETC.

WITH ORIGINAL DESIGNS BY DARLEY.

NEW YORK:
BAKER AND SCRIBNER,
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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE same motive which induced me to write the "SACRED MOUNTAINS" has prompted these sketches, viz. to render more familiar some of the most interesting scenes described in the Bible. As I said in my preface to that work ; delineations of character, incidents, scenes, and indeed principles, are given only in outline in the sacred volume. The elaboration of them, or in other words the filling up, is left to the reader ; for the whole "world could not contain the books that should be written."

The elucidation and application of the great *truths* of the Bible, is the highest work in which a man can be engaged. It involves no less than the theory of our religion and the whole system of moral philosophy, and hence belongs peculiarly to the public teacher

of Christianity. Mine is an humbler task,—leaving the fields of theology and ethics to those better fitted to occupy them, I confine myself to scenes and characters, the outlines of which are furnished by the sacred historian. But though humbler, it is no less a legitimate and proper work.

I have thought it necessary to say thus much, in order to meet the objection which might be raised by the ignorant and prejudiced, that I was “attempting to improve on the Bible.” He who elaborates and explains Christ’s sermon on the Mount, never dreams of *improving* it, and yet is a task which the best man undertakes from the purest and noblest motives. Every sermon on the Sabbath day is an example of this mode of enforcing Christian duty. All the declarations of the Bible are in this way amplified and made simple. The same is true of Scripture *scenes*. There is probably no event described with greater minuteness of details, and which, beside, from its very nature forbids all attempts to make it more pathetic and fearful, than the crucifixion scene, and yet there is none so much dwelt upon in the pulpit, and rightly, too.

For not only was it intended we should do this for

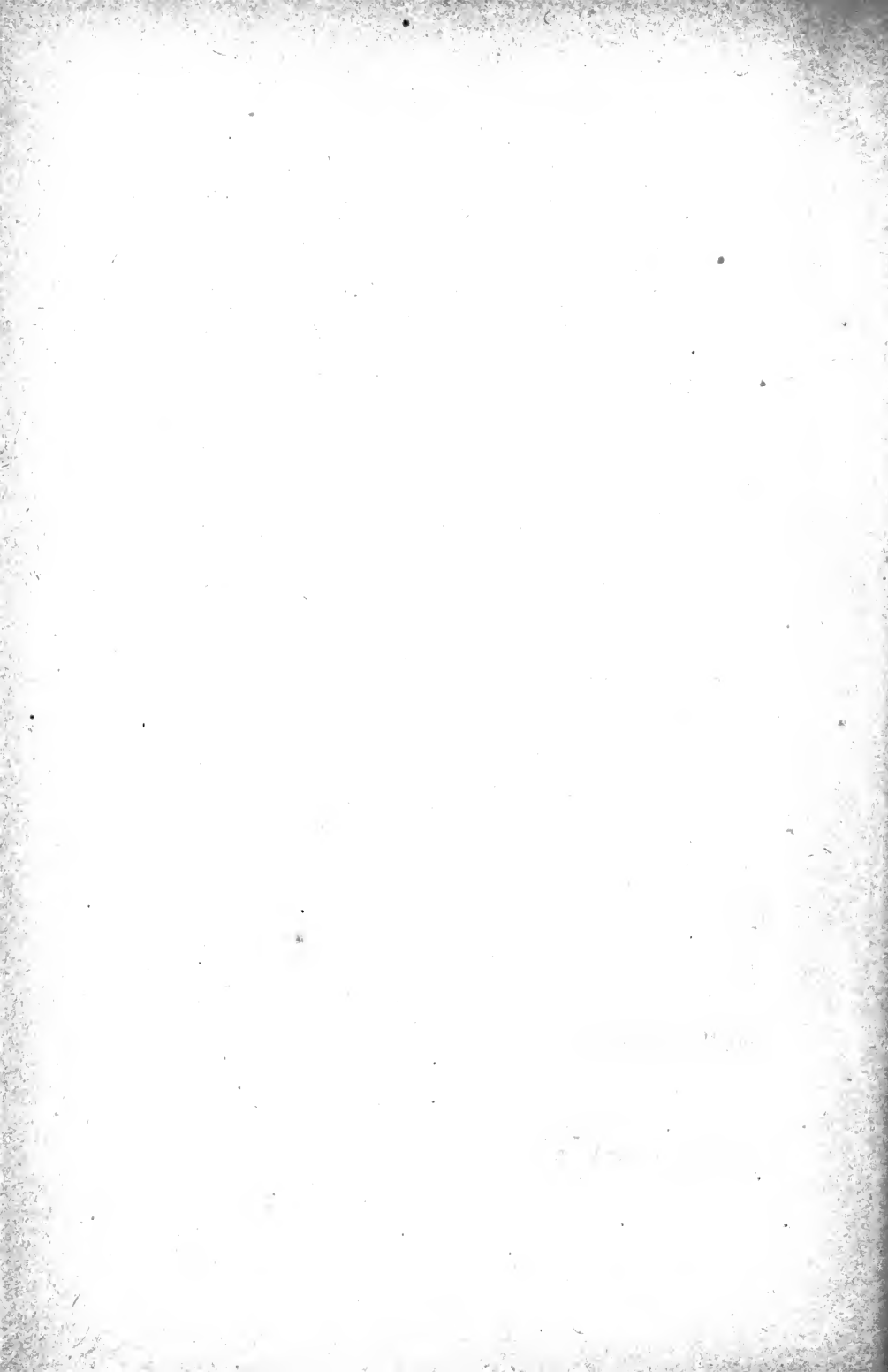


our own benefit and that of others, but the change which passes over language renders it necessary to a right conception of the sacred writings. And so long as the great truth designed to be illustrated by the event, scene or incident, is kept in view, there is not only no wrong done, but a positive good accomplished. This much I have endeavored faithfully to do.

Acting on one principle, "*look into thine own heart, then write,*" I know I shall find those who will sympathize with me; for no man can be true to his own nature without being true to that of many others.

If I succeed in giving greater prominence, and imparting a deeper interest, to some of the scenes and characters of the Bible than they have before possessed, I shall be amply rewarded.

I am aware that the description of a succession of scenes, each of which is chosen for the high-wrought interest it possesses, is apt to appear overstrained; but if truth and nature have been preserved, I am content. For the mere sake of *balancing* a book, I would not depart from either.



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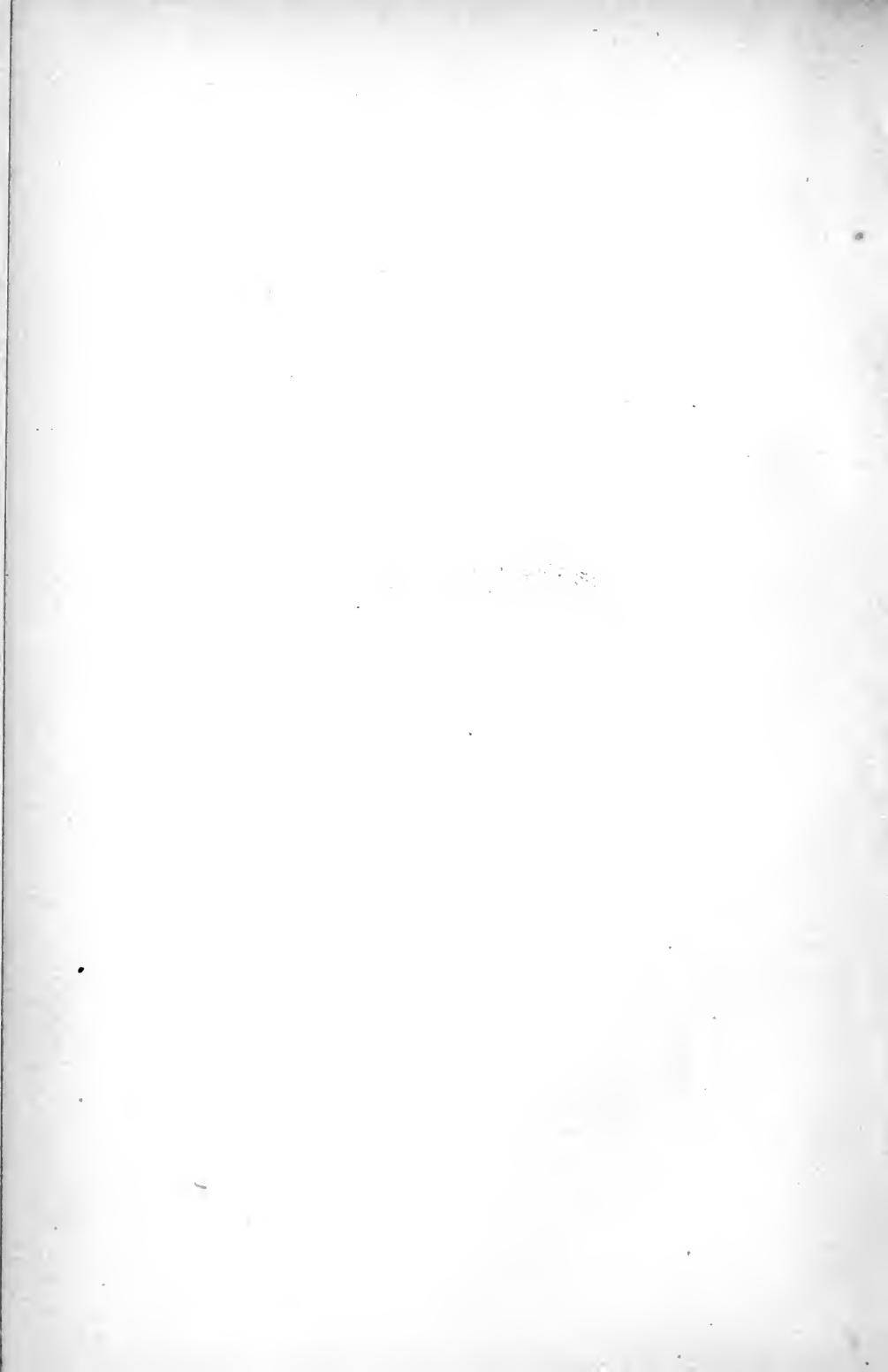
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## I.

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### **THE RED SEA PASSAGE.**

THE last fearful night had at length come—the night of alarm, dread visitation and death. The terrible judgments sent in such rapid succession on the haughty monarch of Egypt were found insufficient to subdue his imperious nature.

The rivers, streams and rills of Egypt had been turned into blood, bearing on their crimson bosom masses of dead and dying fish. Insects and vermin had swarmed into every chamber and closet, dying where they had gathered, till an intolerable stench arose from the fetid heaps. Disease had seized on the cattle, sweeping them away by tens of thousands—a grievous plague smitten the people,

filling the air with notes of lamentation. A storm of thunder, hail and fire commingled, had burst on the land—the flames breaking in angry billows along the streets, and consuming every green thing in their devastating flow. A cloud of locusts, darkening the heavens in their endless flight, followed, devouring every tender blade which had shot forth since the passage of the storm, so that a vast desert spread away where smiling fields had been. Darkness, such as could be felt, for three days covered the earth, till the decimated, diseased and starving population were filled with fearful forebodings that the last hour of time was about to strike.

Amid all this desolation and death, this wreck of his empire ; amid the prayers and maledictions of his suffering and distracted subjects, the iron-hearted monarch stood firm to his purpose. The captives that lay bound to his throne should not go forth free. Sternly defying God, he bore up under these accumu-

lated woes with a resolution and will that astonish us. But now, he was to be struck nearer home, the iron was to enter his own soul, and wring from thence the bitter cry of anguish and entreaty. The first-born in every house, from the first-born of the beggar to the heir-apparent to the throne, was to be smitten. Death in his grimmest form was to darken the door of every dwelling of Egypt; and the night of his dread visitation had arrived. In the solemn hour of midnight, the angel of doom was to tread the quiet hamlet and the thronged city, and his icy hand be laid on one beating heart in every family, and its marble pressure force a death-shriek that should startle every sleeper there; and lo! twelve o'clock was striking. Three bright blood spots on the two door-posts and the lintel of each door of the Israelites—the blood of the passover lamb—showed that within dwelt a Hebrew, and said to the passing angel, “Enter not here.” Humble tenements they

all were, on which these crimson stains were placed, but they contained dwellers nobler and more sacred than the royal palace.

It was midnight, and as the last hour struck, a deep silence rested on the vast city. The tumult of the day and evening was over—the crowd had forsaken the streets, across which dim lights were swinging; and nought broke the solitude save the measured tread of the sentinel walking his nightly rounds, or the rumbling of a chariot as some late reveller returned to his home. Here and there a light was seen in a solitary sick chamber, giving to the gloom a sadder aspect, and out from a narrow alley would now and then burst the sounds of folly and dissipation. All else was still, for the mighty population slumbered as the sea sometimes sleeps in its strength. But suddenly, just as the “ALL’S WELL!” of the drowsy sentinel echoed along the empty streets, piercing shrieks rent the silence; and, passing rapid as lightning from house to

house, and blending in with each other, rung out on the night air with strange and thrilling distinctness. And then came a wail, following heavily after, and rolling up even to the palace and throne of Pharaoh.

Unseen by mortal eye, the angel of death was treading with noiseless step the silent avenues and lanes, putting out one light in each household and dismissing one spirit thence to its long home. In a moment the city was in an uproar; lights danced to and fro; the rapid tread of urgent messengers made the streets echo; the rattling of wheels was heard on every side; but still the wail of desolated houses rose over all, like the steady roar of the surge above the crash of the wreck.

In the midst of this scene of excitement and terror, the children of Israel took their flight. Nearly a million of them, their muffled tread shaking the earth, streamed through the darkness and emerged into the open country.

When the morning dawned in the east, there lay the city before them, its towers and domes flashing back the beams of the rising sun in redoubled splendor. But what a change had passed over it since that sun last looked upon its magnificence. Sobs and cries now arose from every door, for the dead lay in every dwelling.

In solid ranks, the hundreds of thousands of Israel took up their line of march, and night found their tents spread on the edge of the wilderness. Far as the eye could reach, they dotted the open country around, and fringed like a ridge of foam the dark forest beyond. And when night fell on the scene, suddenly a solitary column of fire shot into the heavens, lighting up with strange brilliancy the forest and the encampment. There it stood, lofty as a tower that beetles over the sea, and inherent with light from base to summit. The white tents grew ruddy in its blaze, and the upturned countenances of the innumerable

host that gazed awe-struck on its splendor, shone as if they were standing under a burning palace. All night long it blazed there in their midst and above them, illuming the desert, and shedding unearthly glory on hill, valley and forest.

When the morning came, it turned into a column of snowy whiteness, revolving within itself like a cloud, yet distinct and firm as marble. No voice shook its thick foldings, yet it had a language more potent than that of Moses, and its silent command of "FORWARD," caused every tent to be struck, and set the vast multitude in motion. Over the wide plain it moved in advance of the army, and through the deep gorges it rose far above the mountains, the strangest leader that a host ever followed. When the sun struck it, its long shadow fell across the massive columns in one unbroken beam, filling every heart with fear and dread. At night it stopped and stood still, like a single marble shaft, till darkness

came down, and then it became again a shaft of fire.

Thus, day after day, they continued their march, plunging deeper and deeper in the wilderness, until at length word was brought that the enraged Pharaoh, with his entire army—chosen chariots and all—was in full pursuit. Consternation then filled every heart, and each eye turned anxiously to that mysterious pillar. But no change passed over its silent form—steady and calm as ever, it moved majestically forward, heedless of the shouts and tumult that were gathering in the rear. Perchance at night it did not stop as before, but moved on in the darkness, blazing along the desert, lighting it up with more than noon-tide splendor.

On, on swept the weary host, while every moment nearer and louder roared the storm on their track. Still hoping, yet fearing and trembling, they followed that steadily moving column, until, at last, it stopped on the shore



of the sea. As they pressed up and gathered on the beach, despair seized every heart; for far away naught but a wide waste of water met their gaze, while the unchecked billows broke heavily along its bosom, and behind, rushing on, came the tens of thousands of their foes, panting for the slaughter. That fearful pillar of cloud and fire, then, was only sent to delude them to their ruin. Oh, what lamentations, and prayers, and murmurings went up from the despairing host. They were on the desolate shore, against which the restless sea beat with a monotonous roar, while from the solitude arose the deafening roll of countless chariot wheels, rushing to the shock. All that night, the only obstacle between them and their enemies was that pillar of fire. Yet slight as it seemed, it was more impregnable than a wall of adamant. Still it was a wild and fearful night; the morning must bring the onset and the slaughter; while, as if to heighten the ter-

rors of the scene, a terrific wind arose, driving the sea into billows that fell in thunder on the shore, and sounded as if God also was about to fight against them.

Thus passed this night of anguish and dread to the Israelites; but when the morning dawned, lo! there opened the sea, like a mountain gorge—the green and precipitous sides standing in massive walls on either hand. “FORWARD,” spake the cloud, and the stern command rolled in startling accents along the mighty column, and it descended slowly into the fearful depths. Like an army of insects they moved below, while the billows that broke along the surface of the deep crested over the edge of the watery cliffs above them, as if looking down on the strange spectacle—and the spray that fell on their heads was the “*baptism of the sea.*” The pursuers plunged into the same watery abyss, and as their rapid chariots drew near the flying host, it seemed for a while that the sea had been opened on

purpose to entrap them, and make them fall easier victims to their foes. But at this critical moment, that strange cloud rose up, and moving back over the long line, planted itself in front of the Egyptian army. Its solemn aspect and mysterious form, troubled the monarch and his followers—the wheels rolled from the axletrees of the chariots—the solid ranks became disordered and broken, and terror and tumult took the place of confidence and strength.

At length, the fugitives, with their bleating flocks and lowing herds, ascended the opposite shore: as the last one stepped upon the beach, that dripping cloud also moved up after them,—and then, with a loud crash, the sea smote together, and the waves rolled swiftly on as before. Fierce, circling eddies and whirlpools, and huge bubbles of air bursting on the surface, alone told where the mighty host was buried, and where and how they struggled in the depths. At

length the wreck began to heave upward, and oh! what an overthrow it revealed. Chariots and horses, and spears and shields, and myriads of corpses darkened the sea as far as the eye could reach.

But what a spectacle that shore presented; the beach, the rocks, the hills were all black with the living masses, as they stood trembling and awe-struck, and looked back on the deep. For a long time not a sound broke the death-like silence that reigned throughout the vast throng. Each heart was filled with dread and awe as the heavy swells fell at their feet, casting on the beach with every dash, broken chariots, whole ranks of men, pale in death, and horses and weapons of war.

There, too, stood the cloud, and looked on the scene, while, on its white and lofty form, the eyes of the multitude ever and anon turned reverently from the piles of the dead below. But at last, joy and gratitude, and triumph at their great deliverance, gave way

to the terror that had oppressed them; and suddenly there arose a shout louder than the bursting of the sea, "*Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?*" From rank to rank—from ten times ten thousand lips, rolled on the mighty anthem, till the shore shook with the glorious melody, and the heavens were filled with the strain. And Miriam, with her prophetic face and eye of fire, separated herself from the multitude, followed by a throng of dark-haired maidens, on whose cheeks the glow of excitement had usurped the pallor of fear; and as they moved in shining groups and graceful dances, their silvery voices rung out over the clash of timbrels and roar of the waves in triumphant bursts of music, and "SING YE TO THE LORD,

FOR HE HATH TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY : THE HORSE AND HIS RIDER HATH HE THROWN INTO THE SEA," arose and fell like melody along the rivers of Paradise.

Fearful had been the pursuit, and great was the deliverance.



## II.

---

### ELI.

ELI was a high priest of Israel, possessing great goodness of heart, but wanting firmness of purpose and energy of action. Of tender feelings and vacillating will, he appears to me like a man who would rather submit his neck to the executioner's axe, than himself inflict the blow on one every way deserving his fate. This weakness of character was exhibited in the manner in which he educated his sons. He allowed their bad passions to grow unchecked, so that from wayward children they became wicked men. His conscience compelled him to reprove them, while he failed in energy to enforce his

rebuke. This was the more culpable, since as a high priest, his sons would necessarily themselves be priests: and hence it became him to see that they did not minister with impure hands. Instead of this, however, he let their evil tendencies have such scope that when they assumed the sacerdotal robes, they used their office for selfish ends and the gratification of their base passions. When a man came to offer a sacrifice they appropriated a great part of it to themselves, and insulted the women assembled at the door of the temple. So gross and open was their conduct, that the people turned with disgust from the sacrifice, feeling that no good could come from such mercenary and brutal priests. These enormities were told to Eli, but the doting old man only said, "Why do ye such things?—nay, my sons, it is no good report that I hear." A very weak reproof and wholly disregarded by his contemptuous sons.



At length a man of God came to Eli; and placing before him his past conduct, and recounting, in concise but plain language, the solemn obligations that lay upon him, and the sin he had incurred in not restraining his vicious children, pronounced the doom of utter extermination on his family. Not long after, the same malediction was uttered by the Lord to Samuel, to which the old man bowed his head, saying, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." He had done wrong, and he knew it, and now he would meekly suffer the penalty of his misdeeds.

Time wore on, and at length war was declared between the Israelites and Philistines, and a battle was fought in which the former were beaten, with the loss of four thousand men.

Attributing their defeat to the absence of the ark of the covenant, they sent for it, and Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, of

course accompanied it. The two armies lay opposite each other, awaiting each the onset of his antagonist, when the Israelites saw the ark slowly approaching over the plain, with the mercy-seat of solid gold glittering in the sunbeams. In a moment, despondency gave way to courage, despair to triumph, and there went up a shout that rocked the mountains. "*The Ark of God! The Ark of God!*" rolled in deep Hebrew accents from tens of thousands of lips over the field of battle, sending terror and dismay to the hearts of the enemy. "What shout is that?" ran from lip to lip, and when it was told that the ark of the Lord was in the camp of Israel, they exclaimed, "We are lost! These are the mighty gods which smote the Egyptians and strewed the way from Egypt hither with dead armies, and how shall we escape?" Their leaders, however, encouraged them saying, "Be men and fight bravely. Will you be the Hebrew's slave as he has been

yours? Quit yourselves like men!" Rousing their courage by such appeals they led them to the onset.

What a terrific sight did the battle-fields of old present. Not in solid columns flanked by clouds of cavalry and headed by fierce batteries did they advance slowly to the work of death, but ten times ten thousand men rushed suddenly and savagely upon each other's bosoms, and the battle became so many fierce hand to hand contests. Hence it was longer protracted and more murderous than now.

As these two immense hosts, like two dark clouds, closed on each other, the shout of each drowned for a moment the braying of trumpets and clash of instruments of music. Straight on the ark of God went the Philistine thousands, bearing down everything before them. Israel saw it, and all over the tumultuous field arose the cry—" *To the rescue!*" Begirt with countless foes, the sa-

cred emblem stood still on the plain, while that strong Hebrew shout rolled steadily to the heavens, and the countless masses went pouring forward. Around the holy Shekinah, swords dripping with blood flashed and waved, spears glanced and banners rose and fell. The mercy-seat tottered to and fro in the doubtful fight—the cherubim shook, while clouds of dust rolled over the combatants, and all was rage, terror and confusion. Wicked but brave, Hophni and Phinehas, true to their sacred trust, fell pierced with a hundred wounds, and the boldest of Israel's warriors sealed their fidelity with their blood. Vain valor—trampled under foot, borne backward by the on-rushing thousands, the defenders of the ark broke and fled. With a shout that fell like a death-knell on those brave spirits, their enemies seized the ark and bore it triumphantly away. Faint terror and utter despair seized every heart,—the shriek rang out over the

din of combat, "*The ark is lost! The ark is lost!*" and that magnificent host became a herd of fugitives, sweeping hither and thither over the plain. How well they fought, how freely they bled, we know from the fact that there fell of Israel that day "*thirty thousand footmen.*"

On this same terrible day of battle and of defeat, far off in the beautiful plains of Shiloh, sat an old man by the wayside, listening eagerly to every passing footstep. Bowed over his staff, with pallid cheek and lip, the venerable high-priest of Israel was filled with gloomy forebodings. The ark of God, the idol of his heart, the more than his life, had gone to the doubtful battle field. Ah! was the long-impending curse now to be fulfilled, and the approaching night to be the one which should close on him, a withered trunk, with every green branch lopped away? Each passer-by regarded the blind old man with pity, and spoke cheer-

ing words which fell on unheeding ears. His heart was far away with the host of Israel and the ark of God, and on his dreaming, excited spirit, there came the noise of conflict and sounds of alarm. Thus he sat till evening, and as the glorious sun of Palestine stooped behind the western hills, flooding the valley below with beauty, his melancholy face took an expression of intenser anxiety. The gentle breeze lifted his thin silver locks from his temples, but still he sat like a statue cut from stone, and listened. Hour after hour had worn heavily away, but just as the last sunbeams fell in a shower of gold on his venerable head, the sound of hasty footsteps smote his ear. Not the startled deer lifts his head in more eager attitude, than did that blind old man when first roused from his reverie by that rapid tread, which his heart foreboded too well brought heavy tidings. It was one of the fugitives from the battle field, still crim-

son with the slaughter,—his clothes rent, and dust on his head, and despair in his eye. And lo! as he sped onward with the sad news, a cry of distress and anguish followed him. Eli heard it and asked its meaning. The next moment the messenger of evil stood before him and cried, “I am just from the army, and all is lost. Israel is fled before the Philistines, and her bravest lie dead on the field. *Thy two sons Hophni and Phinehas are slain, and the ark of God is taken.*” Under the defeat of Israel the patriarch bore firmly up: even the death of his two only sons did not shake his aged frame; but when it was told him that the ark of God was taken, he fell dead to the earth. All, all else could be borne: the slaughter of his people, his own and his sons’ death were nothing in comparison to the honor of his God. This last blow broke his heart as with a sudden crash, and he died without uttering his sorrow. Ah! who can tell the

tide of feeling that swept over him at the fatal news. That his sins should be visited on the people and his sons was natural—the prophetic curse had prepared him for this; but that the honor of God, which was dearer to him than life, should suffer for his misdeeds was more than he could bear. The curse had struck deeper than he had anticipated, and in that day of terrible suspense, and in that moment of unspeakable anguish, he received the punishment of a fond but erring father.

Of a noble heart, full of all gentleness and love, pure and upright himself, he yet did not fulfil the responsibilities of a parent. His defects were rather mental than moral, and his crime consisted in not restraining others instead of not controlling himself. All his thoughts, wishes and desires were pure, but he refused to arrest the vices of his children. Too easy in his temper, and doting in his affections, he would not see the evil he was

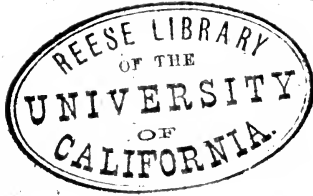


bringing on them, on the people, and on himself. Thus does the fondness of parents, when allowed to blind their eyes to the faults of their offspring, or prevent them from punishing their misdeeds and checking their passions, always end in the misery of both. This is the lesson intended to be taught in this chapter of history, and it must be confessed that it is a fearful one, accompanied with fearful warnings.

How little we know of the designs of heaven and how completely contradictory do they often appear to passing events. Around that ark of God—the symbol of love and mercy—and for the silent tomb of the Son of God, who came to preach peace on earth, more blood has been shed than for any war-like banner that ever floated over a field of slaughter. The frightful wars of the Israelites and the millions slain in the Crusades, to deliver the Holy Sepulchre, are strange facts in history. Yet the ordering of the

one, and the permission of the other, are equally parts of that great plan whose origin is perfect wisdom, and whose result will be the greatest good that could be accomplished. The maudlin philanthropist of the present day, like Eli, of old, cannot look upon severity or death, and would much rather crime should go unpunished, freedom fall, and justice be trampled under foot, than that men should be slain. These are they who would abrogate all law but that of kindness. To them the Old Testament is an antiquated book, and the history of God's dealings with wicked men rather a curious relic of the barbarous past, than the stern and right action of their Maker and Judge.

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### III.

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#### **RUTH.**

THERE seems no reason why the Book of Ruth should have been written except to show the lineage of David. It is simply a sweet pastoral, a truthful tale, embodying the finest sentiments, and placing before us in attractive colors, a young, lovely and beautiful woman. It is a chapter in domestic life, told with charming simplicity, and awakening in the reader feelings of the purest and noblest kind. To one who reads the Bible in course, it comes like a sudden yet sweet surprise. The sterner feelings of his nature have been roused by the turbulent scenes of the book of Judges. Fierce

battles, private murders, and terrific slaughters have followed each other in rapid succession. One of the last scenes that he dwelt upon was the violent death of an unchaste woman, whose dismembered body was sent in bleeding fragments, throughout the land, like the fiery cross of Scotland, to call men to arms, followed by the slaughter of a hundred thousand men, whose corpses strewed the fields—the whole closed by the forcible seizure of women for wives, like the rape of the Sabines.

From such a succession of horrors, the reader comes upon the simple and gentle story of Ruth, like one who emerges from an Alpine gorge, black with thunder-clouds, and filled with the roar of mad torrents, upon a little green pasturage slumbering in the embrace of the hills, along whose quiet surface, herds lazily recline or slowly wander, while the tinkling of bells mingling with the murmur of the streamlet, charms the soul

into pleasure,—the whole seeming, from the very contrast, doubly sweet.

No novelist has ever been able, with his utmost efforts, to paint so lovely, so perfect a character as this simple story presents. From first to last, Ruth appears before us endowed with every virtue and charm that renders a woman attractive. Naomi's husband was a man of wealth, and left Bethlehem to escape the famine that was wasting the land. In Moab he found plenty, and there with his wife and two sons, who married Ruth and Orpah, lived awhile and died. In the course of ten years, the two sons died also, and then Naomi, broken-hearted, desolate and poor, resolved to return and die in her native land. How touching her last interview with her daughters-in-law, when she bade them farewell, and prayed that as they had been kind to her and her dead sons, so might the Lord be kind to them. Surprised that they refused to leave

her, she reasoned with them, saying that she was a widow and childless, and to go with her was to seek poverty and exile in a strange land. She could offer them no home, and perhaps the Jewish young men would scorn their foreign birth, and then when she died none would be left to care for or protect them. There they had parents, brothers and friends, who loved them and would cherish them. On the one hand were rank in society and comfort, on the other disgrace and poverty. Orpah felt the force of this language and turned back; but Ruth, still clinging to her, Naomi declared that it was the act of folly and madness to follow the fortunes of one for whom no bright future was in store, no hope this side the grave. She sought only to see the place of her childhood once more, and then lie down where the palm-trees of her native land might cast their shadows over her place of



rest. "Go back," said she, "with thy sister-in-law."

She might as well have spoken to the rock:—that gentle being by her side, all shrinking timidity and modesty, whose tender feelings the slightest breath could agitate, was immovable in her affections. Her eye would sink abashed before the bold look of impertinence, but with her bosom pressed on one she loved, she could look on death in its grimmest forms unappalled. Fragile as the bending willow she seemed, but in her true love was firm as the rooted oak. The hand of violence might crush her, but never loosen that gentle clasp. With those white arms around her mother's neck, and her breast heaving convulsively, she sobbed forth "*Entreat me not to leave thee*, for where thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest

I will die, and there will I be buried:—  
*naught but death shall part us.*”

Beautiful and brave heart! home, and friends, and wealth, nay, the gods she had been taught to worship, were all forgotten in the warmth of her affection. Tearful yet firm, “*Entreat me not to leave thee,*” she said: “I care not for the future; I can bear the worst; and when thou art taken from me, I will linger around thy grave till I die, and then the stranger shall lay me by thy side!” What could Naomi do but fold the beautiful being to her bosom and be silent, except as tears gave utterance to her emotions. Such a heart outweighs the treasures of the world, and such absorbing love, truth and virtue, make all the accomplishments of life appear worthless in comparison.

The two unprotected women took their journey on foot towards Bethlehem. It was in the latter part of summer, and as they wandered along the roads and through the

fields of Palestine, Ruth by a thousand winning ways endeavored to cheer her mother. Naomi was leaving behind her the graves of those she loved, and, penniless and desolate, returning to the place which she had left with a husband and two manly sons, and loaded with wealth; and hence a cloud hung upon her spirit. Yet in spite of her grief she was often compelled to smile through her tears, and struggled to be cheerful, so as not to sadden the heart of the unselfish innocent being by her side. And at fervid noon, when they sat down beneath the shadowy palm to take their frugal meal, Ruth hastened to the neighboring rill, for a cooling draught of water for her mother, and plucked the sweetest flowers to comfort her.

Thus, day after day, they travelled on, until at length, one evening, just as the glorious sun of Asia was stooping to the western horizon, the towers of Bethlehem arose

in sight. Suddenly a thousand tender associations, all that she had possessed and all that she had lost, the past and the present, rushed over the broken spirit of Naomi, and she knelt, and prayed, and wept. "Call me not," said she to the friends of her early days, who accosted her as she passed through the gates, "call me not Naomi, (or the pleasant,) but Mara, *bitter*, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

Here again Ruth's character shone forth in its loveliness. She was not one of those all sentiment and no principle; in whom devotion is mere romance, and self-sacrifice expends itself in poetic expressions. Though accustomed to wealth, and all the attention and respect of a lady of rank, she stooped to the service of a menial in order to support her mother. With common hirelings she entered the fields as a gleaner, and without a murmur trained her delicate hands to the rough usage of a day-laborer. At night,

her hard earnings were poured with a smile into the lap of her mother, and, living wholly in her world of love, she was unmindful of everything else. Boaz saw her amid the gleaners, and struck with her modest bearing and beauty inquired who she was. On being told, he accosted her kindly, saying that he had heard of her virtues, her devotion to her mother, and her self-sacrifices, and invited her that day to dine at the common table.

With her long, dark locks falling in ringlets over her neck and shoulders, and her cheek crimson with her recent exertions and the excitement at finding herself opposite the rich landlord, in whose fields she had been gleaning, and who helped her at table as his guest, she sat the impersonation of beauty and loveliness. That Boaz was fascinated by her charms, as well as by her character, was evident. He had watched her deportment, and saw how she shunned

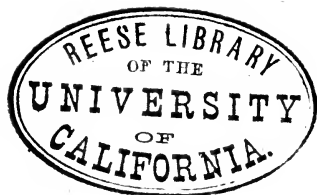
the companionship of the young men who sought her acquaintance, and of whose attentions her fellow gleaners would have been proud. Nothing was too humble, if it ministered to her mother's comfort, but beyond that, she would not condescend to anything inconsistent with her birth. Whether abashed by his looks and embarrassed by his attentions, or from her native delicacy of character, she arose from the table before the rest had finished, and retired. After she had left, Boaz told the young men to let her take from the sheaves without rebuke; and then, as if suddenly recollecting how different she was from the other gleaners, and that every sheaf was as safe where she trod as it would have been in his own granary, he bade them drop handfuls by the way. She, wondering at their carelessness, gathered these up in the afternoon, and at sunset beat out the grain and carried it to her mother. Naomi, surprised at the quantity, questioned her

closely as to where she had gleaned, and when Ruth told her the history of the day, the fond mother divined the whole. Her noble and lovely Ruth had touched the heart of one of her wealthy kinsmen, and she waited the issue.

The long conversations they held together, and the struggles of the beautiful Moabitess, before she could bring herself to obey her mother and lie down at the feet of Boaz, thus claiming his protection and love, are not recorded. Though custom made it proper and right, her modesty and delicacy must have thrown her young heart into a state of agitation that almost mocked her self-control. The silent appeal, however, was felt by her rich relative, and he made her his wife. The devotion to her helpless mother—her self-humiliation in performing the office of a menial—the long summer of wasting toil—the many heart aches caused by the rough shocks she was compelled,

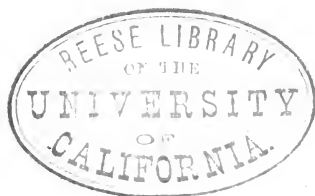
from her very position, to receive, at length met with their reward. Toiling through the sultry day, and beating out her hard earnings at night; the only enjoyment she had known was the consciousness that by her exertions Naomi lived. It had been difficult, when weary and depressed, to give a cheerful tone to her voice, that she might not grieve her anxious mother-in-law; but still the latter saw that the task she had voluntarily assumed was too great, and therefore, at length, claimed from Boaz the obligations of a kinsman. Love, however, was stronger than those claims, and he took Ruth to his bosom with the strong affection of a generous and noble man. She thus arose at once to the rank for which she was fitted; and in time the beautiful gleaner of the fields of Bethlehem became the great-grandmother of King David of Israel.





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#### IV.

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### THE HAND-WRITING ON THE WALL.

ONE evening a royal form was seen walking on the terrace of his palace, and looking off upon the magnificent city at his feet. As his eye swept round the circuit of the walls, fifty miles in circumference, and three hundred and fifty feet high, and saw their hundred lofty gates of brass flashing in the sunbeams, and the hanging gardens suspended nearly four hundred feet in the heavens, loaded with shrubs and waving trees, and sparkling with fountains that leaped from beneath gayly decorated arches; and below on the wilderness of palaces and dwellings at his feet, his lips murmured, "Is not

this great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" And well he might indulge in vain boasting, and believe that naught but an earthquake that should sink the land, could shake the city of his pride. Those massive walls, broad enough for eight or ten carriages to drive abreast upon, rose higher than the loftiest spire of our land, till the clouds seemed to rest on their summits, while around, a deep ditch was sunk, filled by the Euphrates. Twenty-five gates of brass upon each of the four sides, with strong towers between, bade defiance to mangonel or battering ram, while the boldest might shrink from scaling those slippery heights. Fifty streets, each a hundred and fifty feet broad and fifteen miles long, went from gate to gate, lined with palaces and temples and towers, and crowned with arches, till the eye ached with the magnifi-

cence and grandeur that met it at every turn.

But deep down amid those costly piles was a far different scene. By the streams and fountains over which the willows wept, sat a band of Hebrew captives, their harps hanging silent upon the drooping branches, and their heads bowed in grief. To the gay promenaders who paused as they passed, and asked them to sing one of their native melodies, they replied with tears. In that strange land they could not sing, for their hearts were too full of Zion and her sad fate. They were the prisoners left from the spoils of Jerusalem; but their tears and prayers as they sat there scorned and desolate, were shaking that proud city to its overthrow. Little did the haughty monarch think, as he looked on his stronghold, that the cries of those neglected captives were bringing down the lightning of heaven on its towers and battlements; and that to re-

dress *their* wrongs fell at that moment on his ear the voice from heaven, which startled him like a thunder-peal, "THY KINGDOM IS DEPARTED FROM THEE."

Years have passed by, and Nebuchadnezzar is in his tomb, resting in more than regal splendor amid the despots who have gone before him; and another occupies his throne as haughty and wicked as he. Belshazzar, too, has heard, but not heeded, the first mutterings of the coming storm. The Persian thousands have swarmed for a long time around the city to overthrow it, and have battered its massive walls and brazen gates in vain. Equally vain were the attempts to scale the heights from lofty towers of palm-trees; and so the baffled foe sat down to starve the impregnable city into subjection, and for two years hedged it in with a wall of men. At this last attempt, also, the self-confident monarch laughs, for his granaries are stored with provisions for

twenty years. The prophets may prophesy and the captives pray; he mocks at them all, and girdled in by his impregnable walls and fortresses, and surrounded by his myriad troops, he says: "*I will exalt my throne amid the stars of God.*"

It is a night of festivity, and the bacchanal's song and shout ring through the crowded streets of Babylon. Around her ancient towers, the reeling multitude cry hosannas to their gods. Wine flows like water, and lust and revelry walk the streets unchecked. In a magnificent palace, apart from the tumultuous crowd, the king is feasting a thousand of his lords. It is a gorgeous room, column within column, arch above arch, long corridors, splendid statues, costly hangings, leaping fountains, and an endless profusion of ornaments, combine to form a scene of such dazzling splendor, that the unaccustomed spectator is bewildered and lost in its midst. It is illuminated by lights from

golden candlesticks, beneath which is spread a table loaded with golden vessels.

Princes and nobles, wives and mistresses, arrayed in splendid apparel—women whose beauty out-dazzles the splendor that surrounds them,—men of high renown—the gay, the voluptuous, and the proud are there, making the arches ring with their songs of revelry and shouts of mirth. Ever and anon come bursts of music,—now swelling triumphantly out through the amplitude, and now dying away in soft and lulling cadences,—while the perfume from burning censers is wafted in clouds over the intoxicated revellers.

At length the king, excited with wine, exclaims, “Bring forth the vessels of gold that were taken from the Hebrews’ temple;” and the servants bring them in. Gorgeous vessels they were, and as they stood upon the table covered with sacred emblems, and made holy by their dedication to the God



of heaven, they seemed to rebuke those who were about to profane them. But they only laughed, and filling them up with wine, drank confusion to the God of Israel, and "praised their gods of gold and silver and brass and stone." But in the midst of their sacrilege, just as their mirth and madness had reached the highest point, there "*came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote upon the plaster of the wall.*" The sudden flash of that illuminated hand out-dazzled the brilliancy of the lighted room, and as the slowly-moving fingers silently traced the letters of fire before their eyes, terror and dismay fell on the revellers. The startled monarch turned paler than the marble beside him, the untasted goblet fell from his hand, and his knees smote together. Those loudest in their mirth suddenly grew silent as death; the seductive look became solemn and anxious,—the music stopped in the midst of its most joyous burst, and stillness, broken

only by the half-suppressed shriek of the fainting, or the tremulous sigh of utter fear, reigned through the vast apartment. When the dread line was finished, the finger still pointed voicelessly to it, saying in language more impressive than the sternest command, "READ THY DOOM."

Oh! what a sudden change had passed over that hall of riotous mirth: every mouth was sealed, every eye fixed, and the up-turned faces of the throng wore a ghastly hue in the light of that blazing hand and those letters of flame.

At length the king broke the silence, and cried aloud for his astrologers and wise men to read the mysterious writing for him. They came and gazed, and turned away bewildered and terrified. Then Daniel, one of the Hebrew captives, who had been brought a mere boy from Jerusalem, but had grown into favor with the monarch's father, interpreted his dreams and foretold

his doom—was brought in. Turning to those strange letters written in his native language, he slowly read, “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.” Then looking steadfastly on the trembling, pallid king, he unfolded his crimes before him, and, pointing above to the God he had scorned, and whose mandates he had trampled under foot, he read aloud the doom written there in letters of fire on the walls of his own palace: “*God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it,*” for “*thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting: thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.*”

He turned away, and scarcely had the echo of his footsteps died along the silent corridors, when a distant murmur, like the far-off sound of bursting billows arose over the city. It was not the tramp and shout of the drunken multitude. Sterner sounds than the hurrahs of revellers, and steadier footsteps than those of reeling men, com-

mingled there—the battle cry of charging thousands, and the measured tread of an army moving to battle.

The Euphrates had been turned from its channel, and underneath the ponderous gates that closed over its waters, the Persian host had entered, and were already pouring in countless numbers through the streets. In a moment the vast city was in an uproar, and from limit to limit rung the cry of “*to arms, to arms,*” and trumpets pealed and banners waved, and swords clashed, while shouts and shrieks swelled the tumult, that, gathering force at every step, at length rolled like the sea up to the very gates of the palace. The streets ran blood; and borne back before the steadily advancing foe, the weary and mangled fragments of the royal army made a last stand at the palace gates of their master. He, too, turned at bay, and throwing himself amid his guard, made one brave effort for his throne. Overborne and trampled

under foot, he soon fell amid his followers, and the excited conquerors streamed through the royal apartments. They entered the hall of the revellers, and the sacrilegious fell where a moment before they had shouted for their gods. The wine goblets still stood on the table, and the perfume still filled the room, but the *hand-writing* had disappeared, for its denouncing woe had been fulfilled.

The illuminated and gorgeous apartment—the throng of princely feasters—the hand and characters of fire—the battle and the slaughter, had succeeded each other with frightful rapidity, and then the silence of death succeeded all.

Over the sickening scenes of that terrible night we draw the veil of oblivion. A vast and thronged city taken by storm and given up to rapine and lust, is one of the few spectacles that make us abhor our race. But Babylon had fallen, and her glory gone for  
3

ever. In a few years a magnificent ruin was all that remained of her former splendor. Wild beasts and reptiles swarmed through her ancient palaces—the owl hooted in the presence chamber of kings, and the vampyre flapped his wings in the apartments once occupied by the beautiful and the proud. Her strong towers and battlements slowly crumbled back to their original dust, and silence and desolation reigned, where once the hum of a mighty population had sounded. The dust of the desert has long since covered the very ruins, and the Arab now carelessly spurs his steed over the foundations of the former glory of the world.

Turn back your eye for a moment a hundred years before this great overthrow. On the hills of Palestine stands a man whose prophetic eye pierces the future, and whose tongue of fire proclaims in language that thrills the blood, the coming doom of Baby-

lon, the mistress of the world.\* He sees his people carried away captive by her—Jerusalem laid in heaps—the Holy Temple plundered of her treasures, and the God of his fathers held in derision. As he contemplates all this, and then looks beyond and sees the day of vengeance, his soul takes fire, and he pours forth in the loftiest strains of poetry that sublime ode which has no equal on earth. A chorus of Jews first come forward and sing their astonishment at the overthrow of their oppressor. *How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!* “Then the whole earth breaks forth into singing,” and the fir-trees and cedars of Lebanon join the anthem, shouting “*since thou art laid low, no feller is come up against us.*”

The scene then changes to the regions of the dead, and by the boldest figure ever introduced into poetry, the long line of the departed monarchs of Babylon are made

\* Vid. Isaiah xiii. and xlvi.

each to start from his sepulchre, where they have reposed in ghastly rows for ages, and as they move towards the mouth of the gloomy cavern to welcome the last of their race, they chaunt to the fallen king, "Hell from beneath is moved to meet thee at thy coming—it stirreth up the dead for thee, all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. Art thou," they exclaim in derision, "become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave—the worm is spread under thee and the worms cover thee." This funereal and scornful welcome being over, the people of God again break in with the triumphant apostrophe, "How art thou fallen from heaven, oh Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground that didst weaken the nations!"

A hundred years before the downfall of this vast empire, while Babylon ruled the



world, was this sublime and prophetic ode sung by Isaiah. The skeptic may deride the prophesy, but he cannot escape the effect of the sublime language in which it was uttered. The opening of Byron's great ode to Napoleon is a weak imitation, or rather poor paraphrase of it.

“’Tis done—but yesterday a king  
    And armed with kings to strive—  
And now thou art a nameless thing!  
    So abject—yet alive!  
Is this the man of thousand thrones,  
Who strewed our earth with hostile bones,  
    And can he thus survive?  
Since he miscalled the Morning Star,  
    Nor man, nor fiend hath fallen so far.”

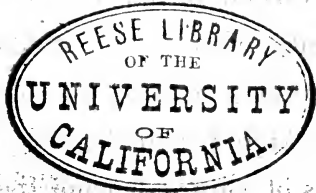
## V.

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### THE CHARIOT OF FIRE.

HEAVEN appears every day to be removing farther and farther from the earth. In those olden times, when the prophets and patriarchs lived, it bent nearer to us than now, and scarcely a week passed, that some of its bright inhabitants were not seen walking along our valleys, or holding sweet converse in those secluded retreats where the good man retired to ponder. It seemed as if they could not at once break away from the bright planet which had been so newly born, and over whose birth "the morning stars sang together for joy." The bowers of Eden, where they had strayed with such





strange and fresh delight, as they gazed at the new immortals their king had placed amid them, were not easily forgotten; and they therefore slowly and reluctantly left those spots, hallowed by innocence and the beings once so pure and happy, and ever and anon returned to see if hope must give way to despair, and this fair orb be abandoned as a *lost* world. But as the tide of wickedness swelled higher and higher, and the quiet solitudes of nature became peopled with sinful men, and tumultuous with their selfish struggles, and mad ambitions, and blasphemies and revelries; they withdrew farther and farther away. Once only did they flock back in shining groups and songs of delight, as if the hour of redemption had arrived; and that was when the Babe of Bethlehem was born.

With the prophets departed the divine presence on earth; and the last effulgence of the holy Shekinah lighted up the Cheru-

bim, when Jerusalem fell before the Chaldeans.

Of all the prophets who conversed so much with God, Elijah is the most remarkable, not only from his character, but from the mystery which wraps his entrance and departure in history. Unlike Samuel, who was educated in the temple ; no account is given of his parentage or early training ; nothing said of his dwelling-place or connections. He bursts upon us with a terrible malediction on his lips, and leaves us in a fierce whirlwind. The first we know, a stately form, wrapped in a mantle, and girded with a leathern girdle ; his beard unshaven, and falling in a white mass upon his breast ; his long and heavy hair resting upon his shoulders, and his dark, solemn eye beaming with unearthly fire, stands before us. We look again, and erect in a chariot of fire, his hands upraised to heaven, he is mounting the skies.

The little time he is on the earth, he appears only at intervals; and then, like some awful messenger from another world, sent to startle the inhabitants of this.

While we are looking in amazement on the madness and crimes of Ahab and Jezebel, and wondering what the end will be, suddenly this mysterious stranger appears before us, confronting the haughty monarch on his very throne, and thundering in his ears—“*As the Lord God of Israel liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain for these years on the land of Israel.*” With this fearful curse yet ringing through the royal apartment, he turns and departs.

We next see him sitting alone by a solitary brook, wrapped in solemn contemplation, while the ravens bring him food. Deep in the tangled forest, with no companions but the wild beasts, that come and look on him in fear, he lies concealed for a whole year. Then he is seen occupying a little chamber,

in a widow's humble dwelling, whose single cruse of oil and barrel of meal never fail while he is her guest. Here, too, the gentler traits of his character exhibit themselves. Tender as he is stern, he pities the sorrows of the lone mother whose only child lies dead, and restores it to life.

Time passes on, and that stately form once more darkens the door of Ahab's chamber. The smitten monarch has never looked upon it since the day that dreadful malediction shook his throne, yet he *remembers it well*. "What," said he, "art thou he that troubleth Israel?" "I," replied the prophet, "have not troubled Israel, but *thou and thy father's house*, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord."

Again he vanishes to re-appear on Mount Carmel, surrounded with an innumerable throng, eager to take his life. The sea is below him, his foes around him, but the heavens of his God bend over him, and open



to his prayer,—and lo! the falling fire sheds a strange and unearthly light upon his kneeling form and upturned countenance, as it consumes the sacrifice.

The scene changes to a deep and sequestered valley, through which murmurs a gentle brook; and there on the bank stands that stern man, and surveys the death struggles of the prophets of Baal as they sink one after another beneath the sword of the slayer. Nearly a thousand of them fall before his vengeance, and the people roll their corpses into the stream, which turns purple with the slain.

The scene shifts again to the top of Carmel, and there, amid the ruins of the altars, the man of doom is kneeling with his face to the sea, that sleeps in quiet majesty below. The scowl of wrath is gone from his brow, and a holy serene light has usurped its place. He is praying for rain, and lo! black thunder clouds are rolling up the brazen heavens,

the sea sobs on the shore,—the rushing sound of a storm fills the air, and the fields of Israel smile again in verdure, and bloom in beauty.

The wilderness once more receives him; and when the curtain again lifts, it discloses a dark and gloomy cavern amid the savage cliffs of Horeb, on the floor of which Elijah is stretched, listening to the heavy plunge of precipices in the gulfs below, and rending of rocks, and groaning of the smitten mountain as it sways and staggers before the storm and the earthquake. In the lull is heard a still small voice, and God passes before him; and the two, the worm and the Deity, are heard talking with each other.

Turn now to that quiet farm on the plains of Palestine. The summer wind is gently blowing—flocks and herds are lazily reclining under the rustling trees—the birds are singing in the branches, while near by, a

farmer with his oxen and plough, is slowly traversing the field, perchance humming to himself some tune as he goes. But while you are looking on this pleasant picture, a majestic stranger crosses with long strides that field, and approaching the unsuspecting peasant, casts his mantle over him. It is Elijah, choosing Elisha as his successor—and the two depart together. Where they go, what they do, is never known.

Years roll on, and Ahab, forgetting the severe lessons he has received, lapses again into his old sinful habits. A rich man has a fine vineyard near his palace, which he wishes to purchase, but cannot, for the former will not sell the old homestead where his father lived, and where he himself was born. Enraged at the refusal, the avaricious monarch causes him to be slain, and then takes possession of his property. But while he is walking over the vineyard, planning

the alterations he wishes to make, a shadow crosses his path.

With a sudden start at the boldness of the intruder, he looks up, and there stands Elijah. "Ah," exclaims the conscience-stricken king, "hast thou found me, oh mine enemy?" With his mantle folded sternly over his breast, and his dark eye fixed movelessly upon him, he replies in slow and measured accents, each word telling like the blow of a hammer, "I *have* found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil; and behold, where the dogs have licked up the blood of Naboth, shall they lick up *thy* blood. Thy posterity shall perish like thee—him that dieth in the city the dogs shall eat, and him that dieth in the field the fowls of the air shall eat. Thy wife, too, shall be thrown a mangled corse over the walls of the city, and the dogs shall devour *her*." Terrible curse, and awfully was it fulfilled.

Again he disappears, and when we next

behold him, he is seated on the top of a high and isolated hill,—the dark outlines of his form showing clear and distinct against the back-ground of sky. As he thus sits, like a statue carved out of stone, a cloud of dust is seen rising in the distance, and a troop of horse come in a sweeping gallop towards him. As they draw up at the base of the hill, on which he sits, they bid him descend, for Ahab has sent them to take him prisoner. He speaks, and the falling lightnings stretch the entire company dead on the plain! A second troop meet the same fate, for woe to him who would lay violent hands on that man of God.

A life so eventful, a character so extraordinary, are not to vanish like a common existence. A succession of such terrific experiences is to close up with an event greater than all that have preceded it. How it became known, no one can tell; but the “sons of the prophets” all over Israel were aware

that Elijah's departure from this world was about to take place, and they expected some fearful exhibition would accompany it.

This firm and terrible man—before whom kings trembled, and on whose lips the fate of nations hung, knew he had finished his mission, and calmly, serenely waited the hour of his release. He had become deeply attached to Elisha, and the latter to him. They had wandered together as friends and fugitives over the fields and through the forests of Israel. They had slept side by side ; they had prayed together, and conversed with God together. But now he felt that it might be better to go alone to the spot where God should meet him ; and he said to Elisha, "Tarry here, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." But Elisha knew that his master was about to leave him, and he determined to remain with him to the last ; and he replied, "*As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.*" A strong

oath, and revealing a purpose too fixed and settled to be moved by any expostulation. So they went on to Bethel together. There the sons of the prophets met them, and taking Elisha aside, said in a whisper: "Do you know that the Lord is going to take away your master, to-day?" Nervous and agitated, his heart breaking at the thought of separation, and his feelings excited at the scenes he knew were before him, he could not bear their questions, and he replied, "*I know it; hold your peace.*" Here again Elijah kindly endeavored to get rid of him, telling him to stay there while he went to Jericho. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," was still the reply. There is something inexpressibly touching in the kind, nay, almost childish way, in which the prophet endeavored to shake off his devoted follower. He who had frowned down monarchs, and faced a thousand foes alone, could not speak harshly to

the true heart that clung so affectionately to him to the last.

At Jericho the same attempt was repeated with the same success, and then the two went on alone towards the river Jordan. Fifty men, sons of prophets, followed at a distance, and running up every eminence, stood and watched with eager countenances those two solitary forms, as they slowly crossed the fields to the river's brink. Having reached the shore, Elijah stood and gazed a moment on the swift-rushing waters, then folding up his mantle, smote them in the name of the Lord. The rapid current rolled back on itself in affright, and piling up in a green and massive wall, left a dry path for him and his friend, and then, as they passed, rushed swiftly together again. Ascending the opposite bank, they were seen moving away, by the astonished spectators in the distance, towards the open plain. What they talked of is not known ; but expressions



of affection were doubtless mingled with wondrous thoughts and bright visions of the world to come. Oh! how the words of a man so near the presence-chamber of the Deity must have burned! At length they stopped, and Elijah, turning to Elisha, said in kind and solemn accents: "I am now about to leave thee: ask what I shall do for thee before I go." "Let," replied Elisha, "let a double portion of thy spirit fall upon me." "A hard thing," indeed; nevertheless, said the prophet, "if thou seest me when I am taken away, it shall be so." In the midst of this strange, exciting interview, a rushing sound was heard, and like a falling star, a bright and fearful object came cleaving the fields of space, and lo! a chariot and horses of fire were sweeping full upon them. Under the tramp of those steeds of flame, and fierce rolling of those fiery orbs, the elements became convulsed, and a wild hurricane involved the earth and heavens. The bright

cavalcade drew up between the two prophets, and the fearful driver stretched forth his hand, and lifted Elijah in, and away went steeds and chariot like an ascending glory. Stunned and bewildered, Elisha exclaimed: "My father! my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." But as the dazzling vision vanished, he saw a dark object fluttering back to earth. *It was Elijah's mantle fraught with Elijah's spirit.*



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## VI.

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### ABSALOM.

WE have Apollo Belvederes, Jupiters, the Venus de Medici, and a host of fictitious personages wrought in marble, as the embodiment of what is most beautiful in form and feature, but no Absalom; and yet a more superb and perfect physical development was never seen than his. At least, no one ever had so high a compliment paid to his mere person as he; for the inspired historian says, "there was none in all Israel *so praised for his beauty,*" "*and from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him.*" He must have been made after a magnificent model. To a form of splendid proportions

*Beauty*

and faultless symmetry, was added a face of incomparable beauty—not the mere beauty of flesh, and color, and regular features, but of *expression*. In it you saw the poet, the hero, the orator, and the man of thought and energy all combined. Around this chiselled countenance, long dark locks hung in rich and waving masses, throwing into still greater relief his throat and chest of classic elegance and strength. But underneath this face of almost celestial beauty, slumbered a whirlwind of untamed passions. His smile was sweet and gentle, and caressing as a woman's, yet his hatred was fearful and deadly, as that of a “nursing cat o' the mountain.” His large and lustrous eye, veiled with its long dark lash, would melt in tenderness; yet when kindled into rage, its glance *withered* where it fell. His voice was soft and rich, and musical to those whose love he would win; yet his battle shout sent the blood to the heart, like the blast of a bugle. Aware

of his power over others, he would allay their suspicions and win their confidence, even while unsheathing the dagger he designed to plunge in their bosoms. Of fierce impulses and passions, and a spirit that scorned restraint, he yet had perfect command over himself. Like the lion, which, though devoured with hunger, can coolly await the moment till his spring shall prove fatal; so he, while tortured with the thirst for vengeance, could patiently bide his hour—for his hatred was tireless as time.

Such was Absalom—possessed of many noble qualities, and capable of becoming a great and good man. Standing before us in his peerless beauty and perfect manhood, he enlists our sympathies and anxiety. We know at the outset, that his life will be no smooth and steady current; but through fearful trials to greatness, or through dark crimes to a violent, ignominious death, he is sure to go. No wonder David loved him, for all his

natural affection was enhanced by the beauty of his son, and the lofty qualities he detected in his character, as well as by his fear of the curbless nature of his passions.

It was unfortunate for Absalom, that the first trial to which he was subjected, was one he was least fitted to bear well. Like many other strong, but proud and passionate natures, his first departure from right, had its origin in his better feelings. Aroused to sudden indignation by a great and inexcusable wrong, such men often *pass suddenly to its revenge*, and thus make a noble impulse lead to a dark and dreadful crime.

Absalom had a beautiful sister, Tamar, who had unconsciously awakened in her brother Ammon the basest desires. Resolved to get possession of her person, he feigned sickness; and when she, at his urgent request, came to nurse him, he effected by violence, what he had failed to accomplish by persuasion. Disgusted, as brutal passion always is, with the



object that aroused it, he then bade her be-gone ; and when crushed and broken-heart-ed, she told him that the wrong of sending her forth disgraced, was greater than the one he had just committed, he called angrily for his servants, and ordered them to " thrust her out, and bolt the door after her," and she went forth a blighted thing.

At this same hour, Absalom was sauntering along the streets of Jerusalem, when his foot-steps were suddenly arrested by a loud and bitter cry. Looking up he saw a female, with her garments torn, ashes on her head, and her long hair dishevelled and soiled, and streaming around her naked shoulders, ap-proaching him. As she drew near, wringing her hands and weeping, he perceived with astonishment, that the garments that fluttered in rags about her person, were those of a princess—the court dress of king David's palace. Another look, and he staggered as under a sudden blow, and his face became

paler than marble—for that wretched distracted being was his *beautiful sister Tamar*.

Amid her broken sobs, he caught the story of the dark crime his brother had committed; but curbing the wrath which the relation awakened within him, he consoled her with kind words, and took her to his own house.

After this, all intercourse between the two brothers ceased, and for a long time Ammon was constantly on his guard against the attacks of Absalom. The latter, however, showed no inclination to resent the outrage, and his suspicions gradually wore away. Thus two years passed, during which, Absalom, though preserving a calm exterior, was absorbed with one single desire—that of revenge. This was constantly fed by the desolate and broken-hearted appearance of his lovely and wronged sister. Her pale cheeks, melancholy countenance, and long and passionate fits of weeping, made the out-

nursed  
revenge

rage ever fresh, and gave a sacredness to the crime he designed to perpetrate.

At length he persuaded his father to send Ammon with the rest of his brothers into the country, to help him shear his sheep. Not long after, as they sat one day at dinner, Absalom plied Ammon with wine, until the latter in his mirth and laughter, forgot everything but the present enjoyment. He then made a slight signal to his servants, and in an instant a dozen daggers, gleamed over the bosom of the wretched criminal, and the next moment he was weltering in his blood. Terror and dismay seized the rest, and mounting their mules they fled to the city, carrying the sad news to their distracted father.

Absalom immediately fled to another country, where he remained a self-exile for three years. His father, however, could not forget him, and it was evident to all his court, that his heart yearned towards that fiery and wayward son. With a melancholy counte-

*Father yearned  
for him*

nance, and drooping head, he wandered about his palace, seeking in vain for happiness. In pity for his forlorn condition, they laid a plot to get Absalom back, and succeeded, and his splendid form was once more seen treading the streets of Jerusalem. David, however, would not see him, and he remained banished from the palace for two years more.

*Reconciliation*

But knowing the strength of parental affection, and that if he could once see his father, a reconciliation would follow; he at length managed to secure an interview, when a kiss from the doting parent cancelled all the dreadful past, and he was restored to full favor. With chariots, and fifty horsemen as a body-guard, he assumed all the regal appointments and display of a prince of the blood, and even carried his ambition so far, as to erect a magnificent column to himself, to perpetuate his name. But with this sudden elevation to favor and power, began that unnatural treason, which makes us shrink in

*Plot*

abhorrence from his character. To make a reconciliation the basis of a conspiracy, and turn the fondness of a father into the means of his destruction, reveals a heart, if not rotten from the outset, at least so debased and degenerate, that we lose all hope of its recovery.

Though there can be no excuse for a traitor, and least of all, for such a traitor as he, there may be circumstances influencing him in his course, which will cause us to mingle sympathy with our abhorrence. To a man of Absalom's pride and temper, the outrage perpetrated on his sister was a hard thing to bear. Revenge he must have, and revenge nursed in the heart for two years, seeking only a favorable moment for the accomplishment of its purpose, is sufficient to overthrow a stronger moral nature than his. This gradual lapse of his character, was accelerated by the crime itself. Then followed the long years of banishment, during which

*Motivation*

he had nothing to do but brood over his disgrace and poverty, and nurse feelings of bitter hatred against a father, who would hunt him down for taking vengeance on the man who had dishonored his daughter. The two years, also, he was in Jerusalem, denied the palace, and treated with the neglect and disrespect which are always shown to one who is in disgrace at court, added to all the accumulation of wrath, and mortified pride, and recklessness, which had long before rendered him fit for any desperate deed. But his ruin was effected by the first step—he had no business, no right, to take the vindication of his sister's honor from the father's hands, especially when that father was king, and could do as he liked, and the criminal and the victim were both his own children. It was arrogant in him, thus to assume both the monarch's and the father's place, and the very act, which in other circumstances we could palliate, reveals an untamed nature, and a

spirit in which anger is stronger than principle.

The deliberate manner in which he plotted the overthrow of his father's throne, and the cool and calculating process by which he brought the unnatural rebellion to head, expose not only the depravity and ambition; but the tireless energy and firm character of the man. Every morning early, found him at the gate of the city, accosting each stranger as he entered with that bland and persuasive manner so few could resist. "From what part of the country do you come?" he inquired; "and what is your business here?" To be thus noticed by a prince was sufficient condescension; but when he went farther, and asked of his troubles and grievances, and sympathized with him, exclaiming, "Oh that I were a judge in Israel; how soon would I interest myself in your suit, and redress your wrongs!" the unsuspecting countryman was completely won over, and re-

turned to his home filled with the praises of Absalom. And when any of the lower classes paused to render him that homage which was his due as prince of the blood, he checked him, and taking him aside, kissed him, and whispered flatteries and promises in his ears. How could the embarrassed subject resist the attentions and familiarities of so kind and splendid a prince. He boasted of it to his fellows, and they in turn proved that condescension. Added to all this, he mourned over the absence of justice, and complained of the loose manner in which his father administered the government. Thus, by his hypocritical cant, his bewitching manners, eloquent tongue, base flatteries, and magnificent appearance, "*he stole away the hearts of the people.*"

Year after year he prosecuted this cunning but nefarious plan, till all over the land there was a secret wish that he could sit in king David's place. When he discovered this,



he organized his conspiracy ; and under pretence of going to Hebron, to pay a vow to the Lord, he set up there his standard, and blew his trumpet of defiance. That bugle blast shook the throne of his father to its foundations, and he fled in affright and grief from his palace and capital. Still a host of brave hearts clung to him, ready to fight and die in his defence.

Thus two immense armies were gathered around the father and the son. After various marches and counter-marches, and changes of counsel, they at length drew near each other, and the final struggle approached. On that day the king, at the request of his followers, remained behind in the gate of the town, where he had taken up his quarters ; and it is more than probable it required no great urging to keep him from going forth to meet his son in the deadly encounter. But as he saw the tens of thousands defile before him in all the pomp and

splendor of battle array, a deathly sickness came over his heart. The shrill trumpet, that had so often stirred him, as he rode at their head to do battle for his kingdom, sounded like a funeral knell; for to him victory and defeat were equally terrible. To save his throne at the expense of his son, was asking too much of his parental heart, but it must be done for Israel's sake. Yet to his generals, as they saluted him ere they departed to the battle field, he said in tremulous accents, "Deal gently for *my sake* with the young man, *even with Absalom.*"

With waving standards, and flourish of trumpets, the mighty host took up the line of march, and as the echo of their muffled tread and martial strains died away in the distance, who can tell how the desolate father felt. Ere the sun should go down, that host would return shouting victory, or return no more; and he be a fugitive on the face of the earth, or his son slain or lost to him forever. Oh,

what fervent prayers he put up for that handsome and wayward youth, and what floods of sorrow swept over his aged bosom.

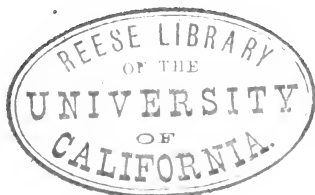
The two armies met in a thick forest, and the battle at once became fierce and sanguinary. Amid the braying of trumpets, the neighing of steeds and clash of weapons, the shout of Israel and Absalom was heard ringing over the din, as brothers and friends closed in the mortal struggle. They fought long and bravely, but the rebel forces at length gave way, for God was on the father's side. Absalom saw with despair the rout of his best troops, and strove with almost superhuman efforts to stay the reversed tide of battle. Vain valor—broken and dispersed, they fled on every side, and twenty thousand corpses strewed the forest. Enraged and desperate, Absalom, bareheaded, his long tresses streaming in the wind, spurred all alone on the king's guard, doubtless in the hope of finding his father, and by one bold

blow restoring his fortunes. But as he was galloping under an oak, his hair caught on a knotty branch, and stripping him from his mule, left him dangling in mid-heaven. He strove desperately to reach the limb and extricate himself, but in vain. He now cursed the hair, which had ever before been his glory, and saw, with unutterable anguish, the crown and throne for which he had perilled all, vanish from his grasp. While thus struggling, he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and wrenching half around, he saw Joab, the fiercest general of the royal army, approaching. He knew too well the hate that fiery warrior bore him, to expect or ask mercy; and with a countenance pale as marble, and a brow knit in stern defiance, he awaited his doom. Joab reined up before him, and gazing a moment on the helpless prince, drew forth a javelin and hurled it in his body. Another and another followed, and Absalom swung a corpse in the forest.

The sun went down in blood, and just at evening, David, who had not moved from his seat in the gate all day, saw, as he looked in the direction of the battle field, a messenger swiftly approaching. As he drew near, the trembling father exclaimed, "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" For a moment his crown, his throne and Jerusalem were all forgotten in the overwhelming anxiety for his son. Nature could not be repressed, and he cried, "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" Oh, what a world of love, solicitude and distress does that burst of parental feeling reveal! The panting messenger saw it, and had not the courage to tell his royal master that his son was dead; and not till a second came, did the dreadful truth burst upon him. Then struck as by a death-blow, he arose and staggered to his chamber, and falling on his face upon the floor, gave way to the flood of sorrow he could no longer repress. His anxious attendants without, heard his convulsive

sobs, and in the intervals, the touching exclamation, wrung by overwhelming agony from his bosom: "*Oh my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, Absalom, my son, my son!*" The rebel and traitor was forgotten in the gush of parental tenderness; he no longer saw his proud standard and fierce battle array; he could see only the beautiful face of his boy, pale in death; that form which had been the pride of his heart, and which he had so often strained to his bosom, mangled, and torn, and bleeding on the earth. He no longer heard his shout of rebellion and defiance; he could hear only the low "*My father,*" which had so often made his bosom heave with joy. For a long time no one dared to approach him—no shouts of victory rolled through the streets—no bursts of joyful music, as the triumphant thousands streamed back into the city. A funereal sadness and silence rested on all, and pity and anxious

foreboding mingled on every countenance; for still, from that solitary chamber rang the heart-piercing cry of the fallen monarch, "*Oh my son Absalom! Oh Absalom, my son, my son!*" Thus, for a long time did the heart-broken father sob forth his anguish, for his was a grief that mocked control. Oh what a noble nature there suffered!



## VII.

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### THE POWER OF BEAUTY,

OR, HADASSAH OR ESTHER.

It is a little singular that the words, God or Providence, are not mentioned in the whole book of Esther. The writer seems studiously to have avoided any reference to them, as if he did not wish to recognize the interposition of Heaven in any of the events that transpired; while his *narrative* is evidently designed to teach nothing else. The hand of Providence is everywhere seen managing the whole scheme.

Ahasuerus, king over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, and prosperous to the extent of his vast ambition, made a grand exhibition of his wealth to his subjects, which



lasted six months. At the end of this time, he gave a feast to continue a week. The court of the garden of his palace was paved with the choicest marbles, black, red, blue, and white. From this costly floor, pillars of polished marble arose, supporting a gorgeous canopy, while all around were the richest hangings, upheld by cords and rings of silver. Beneath this magnificent drapery, were spread couches, covered only with gold and silver cloths. In the midst, the table was laid—groaning under a weight of gold—every goblet being of solid gold, and each differing from the other in its form and elaborate workmanship. The queen had a similar feast in her apartments for the women, and all was mirth and festivity. At the end of the week, however, when the dissipation had reached its height, the king—merry and uxorious from his long and deep libations—sent for his wife to come and show herself to his guests, that they might praise her beauty.

Knowing the state her husband was in, and also the shocks her delicacy would receive in the interview, she refused to go. The king was just drunk enough to be dignified, and hence received this refusal as a mortal offence. He asked the wise men about him, what should be done in such an extraordinary case. Much wiser than if they had been sober, they one after another expressed proper horror at the monstrous act, and stroking their beards and looking grave and sage, told him that it was a matter that concerned not only him, but husbands the world over; for if such a thing should be passed by in silence, all authority over their wives would end. Poor Vashti could not but suffer before such a jury, and she was unqueened at once.

When the king, however, came out of his dissipation, he began to pine for his beautiful wife. His favorites no sooner perceived this, than they set on foot a plan to wean him entirely from her. They knew her restoration

would be the signal of their disgrace and banishment—so all the beautiful virgins of that vast realm were brought before him, from whom, after a trial which does as much honor to the morals, as to the wisdom of those sages, he was to select one as a wife. Among these was Hadassah, a Hebrew maiden whose parents were dead, and who had been reared by her cousin Mordecai, one of the prisoners carried away when the king of Babylon took and sacked Jerusalem.

The character of Esther is here exhibited at the outset; for when she went into the presence of the king, for his inspection, instead of asking for gifts as allowed by him, and as the others did, she took only what the chamberlain gave her. Of exquisite form and faultless features, her rare beauty at once captivated the king, and he made her his wife. Following the advice of her cousin, she never told him her lineage, and the enthralled monarch forgot his former queen.

Mordecai always reminds one of Hamlet. Of a noble heart, grand intellect, and unwavering integrity, there was nevertheless an air of severity about him—a haughty, unbending spirit, which, with his high sense of honor, and scorn of meanness, would prompt him to lead an isolated life. I have sometimes thought that even he had not been able to resist the fascinations of his young and lovely cousin, and that the effort to conceal his feelings had given a greater severity to his manner than he naturally possessed. Too noble, however, to sacrifice such a beautiful being by uniting her fate with his own, when a throne was offered her; or perceiving that she could never return his love—indeed could cherish no feeling but that of a fond daughter—he crushed his fruitless passion, even if it had for a moment mastered him. In no other way can I account for the life he led, lingering forever around the palace gates, where now

and then he might get a glimpse of her who had been the light of his soul, the one bright bird which had cheered his exile home. That home he wished no longer to see, and day after day he took his old station at the gates of Shushan, and looked upon the magnificent walls that divided him from all that had made life desirable. It seems, also, as if some latent fear that Haman, the favorite of the king—younger than his master and of vast ambition—might attempt to exert too great an influence over his cousin, must have prompted him to treat the latter with disrespect, and refuse him that homage which was his due. No reason is given for the hostility he manifested, and which he must have known would end in his own destruction. Whenever Haman with his retinue came from the palace, all paid him the reverence due to the king's favorite, except Mordecai, who sat like a statue, not even turning his head to notice him. He acted like one tired

of life, and at length succeeded in arousing the deadly hostility of the haughty minister. The latter, however, scorning to be revenged on *one* man, and he a person of low birth, persuaded the king to decree the slaughter of all the Jews in his realm. The news fell like a thunderbolt on Mordecai. Stern, proud, and indifferent to his own fate, he had defied his enemy to do his worst; but such a savage vengeance had never entered his mind. It was too late, however, to regret his behavior. Right or wrong he had been the cause of the bloody sentence, and he roused himself to avert the awful catastrophe. With rent garments, and sackcloth on his head, he travelled the city with a loud and bitter cry, and his voice rang even over the walls of the palace in tones that startled its slumbering inmates. It was told to Esther, and she ordered garments to be given him. But he refused to receive them, and sent back a copy of the king's decree,

respecting the massacre of the Jews, and bade her go in, and supplicate him to remit the sentence. She replied that it was certain death to enter the king's presence unbidden, unless he chose to hold out his sceptre; and that for a whole month he had not requested to see her. Her stern cousin, however, unmoved by the danger to herself, and thinking only of his people, coldly replied that she might do as she liked—if she preferred to save herself, deliverance would come to the Jews from some other quarter, but she should die.

From this moment the character of Esther unfolds itself. It was only a passing weakness that prompted her to put in a word for her own life, and she at once arose to the dignity of a martyr. The blood of the proud and heroic Mordecai flowed in her veins, and she said, "Go, tell my cousin to assemble all the Jews in Shushan, and fast three days and three nights, neither eating nor drinking; I

and my maidens will do the same, and on the third day I will go before the king, and *if I perish, I perish.*" Noble and brave heart! death—a violent death is terrible, but thou art equal to it!

There, in that magnificent apartment, filled with perfume,—and where the softened light, stealing through the gorgeous windows by day, and shed from golden lamps on marble columns and golden-covered couches, by night, makes a scene of enchantment,—behold Esther, with her royal apparel thrown aside, kneeling on the tessellated floor. There she has been two days and nights, neither eating nor drinking, while hunger, and thirst, and mental agony, have made fearful inroads on her beauty. Her cheeks are sunken and haggard—her large and lustrous eyes dim with weeping, and her lips parched and dry, yet ever moving in inward prayer. Mental and physical suffering have crushed her young heart within her, and now



the hour of her destiny is approaching. Ah! who can tell the desperate effort it required to prepare for that dread interview. Never before did it become her to look so fascinating as then; and removing with tremulous anxiety the traces of her suffering, she decked herself in the most becoming apparel she could select. Her long black tresses were never before so carefully braided over her polished forehead, and never before did she put forth such an effort to enhance every charm, and make her beauty irresistible to the king. At length fully arrayed, and looking more like a goddess dropped from the clouds, than a being of clay, she stole tremblingly towards the king's chamber. Stopping a moment at the threshold to swallow down the choking sensation that almost suffocated her, and to gather her failing strength, she passed slowly into the room, while her maidens stood breathless without, listening, and waiting with the intensest anxiety the

issue. Hearing a slight rustling, the king, with a sudden frown, looked up to see who was so sick of life as to dare to come unbidden in his presence, and lo! Esther stood speechless before him. Her long fastings and watchings had taken the color from her cheeks, but had given a greater transparency in its place, and as she stood, half shrinking, with the shadow of profound melancholy on her pallid, but indescribably beautiful countenance,—her pencilled brow slightly contracted in the intensity of her excitement,—her long lashes dripping in tears and her lips trembling with agitation; she was in herself—though silent—an appeal that a heart of stone could not resist. The monarch gazed long and silently on her, as she stood waiting her doom. Shall she die? No; the golden sceptre slowly rises and points to her. The beautiful intruder is welcome, and sinks like a snow-wreath at his feet. Never before did the monarch gaze on such transcendent love-

liness ; and spell-bound and conquered by it, he said in a gentle voice : “ What wilt thou, queen Esther ? What is thy request ? it shall be granted thee, even to the *half of my kingdom !*”

Woman-like she did not wish to risk the influence she had thus suddenly gained, by asking the destruction of his favorite, and the reversion of his unalterable decree, and so she prayed only that he and Haman might banquet with her the next day. She had thrown her fetters over him, and was determined to fascinate him still more deeply before she ventured on so bold a movement. At the banquet he again asked her what she desired, for he well knew it was no ordinary matter that had induced her to peril her life by entering, unbidden, his presence. She, in reply, invited him to a second feast, and at that to a third. But the night previous to the last, the king could not sleep, and after tossing awhile on his troubled couch, he called

for the record of the court, and there found that Mordecai had a short time before informed him, through the queen, of an attempt to assassinate him, and no reward been bestowed. The next day, therefore, he made Haman perform the humiliating office of leading his enemy in triumph through the streets, proclaiming before him, "This is the man whom the king delighteth to honor." As he passed by the gallows he had the day before erected for that very man, a shudder crept through his frame, and the first omen of coming evil cast its shadow on his spirit.

The way was now clear to Esther, and so the next day, at the banquet, as the king repeated his former offer, she, reclining on the couch, her chiselled form and ravishing beauty inflaming the ardent monarch with love, said in pleading accents, "I ask, O king, for *my life*, and that of my people. If we had all been sold as bondmen and bondwomen,

I had held my tongue, great as the evil would have been to thee." The king started, as if stung by an adder, and with a brow dark as wrath, and a voice that sent Haman to his feet, exclaimed: "*Thy life!* my queen? *Who* is he? *where* is he that dare even think such a thought in his heart?" He who strikes at thy life, radiant creature, plants his presumptuous blow on his monarch's bosom. "*That man,*" said the lovely pleader, "*is the wicked Haman.*" Darting one look of vengeance on the petrified favorite, he strode forth into the garden to control his boiling passions. Haman saw at once that his only remaining hope was, in moving the sympathies of the queen in his behalf; and approaching her, he began to plead most piteously for his life. In his agony he fell on the couch where she lay, and while in this position, the king returned. "What!" he exclaimed, "will he violate the queen here in my own palace!" Nothing more was said: no order

was given. The look and voice of terrible wrath in which this was said were sufficient. The attendants simply spread a cloth over Haman's face, and not a word was spoken. Those who came in, when they saw the covered countenance, knew the import. It was the sentence of death. The vaulting favorite himself dared not remove it—he must *die*, and it only remained for him to wait the moment of execution. In a few hours he was swinging on the gallows he had erected for Mordecai.

After this, the queen's power was supreme—everything she asked was granted. To please her, the monarch let his palace flow in the blood of five hundred of his subjects, whom the Jews slew in self-defence. For her he hung Haman's ten sons on the gallows where the father had suffered before them. For her he made Mordecai prime minister, and lavished boundless favors on the hitherto oppressed Hebrews. And right

worthy was she of all he did for her. Lovely in character as she was in person, her sudden elevation did not make her vain, nor her power haughty. The same gentle, pure and noble creature when queen, as when living in the lowly habitation of her cousin—generous, disinterested, and ready to die for others—she is one of the loveliest characters furnished in the annals of history.



## VIII.

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### INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD,

OR, SAMUEL AND SAUL.

ONE evening, just as the sun was setting over the hills of Palestine, a host was seen encamped in a beautiful valley, through which wandered a clear stream, and over whose green surface, woods, and fields, and flocks, and herds, were scattered in endless variety and profusion. The white tents dotted the landscape far and wide, standing against the green background distinct as a fleet of snowy sails against a storm-cloud on the sea. Between, glittered long rows of chariots, while gay standards floating above,



and groups of officers and ranks of soldiers moving about, gave animation and life to the scene. At intervals came triumphant bursts of music, and the thrilling strains of the trumpet arose and fell over the plain, till the echoes were lost in the woods beyond. And the evening sun was shining on all this, tipping the tens of thousands of lance-points with silver, and flashing back from burnished armor, till the eye became dazzled with the splendor.

On a gentle eminence that overlooked this glittering plain, was spread the tent of the king. Of ample dimensions, and decorated with gorgeous hangings and costly ornaments, it looked like a fairy palace there upon the swelling hill-top. Underneath its spreading canopy sat the monarch himself, gazing thoughtfully upon the prospect below him. It was a scene to stir a warrior's heart, for every one of those countless tents that stood bathed in the sunlight, contained soldiers

true and tried ; and the whole vast host at his feet was but a single instrument in his hand. At the blast of his trumpet, that plain would tremble under the tread of armed men, twice ten thousand lances shake in the departing sunbeams ; and, at his command, rank upon rank rush all steadily on a stand of levelled spears. They had often crowded after him to battle, and stood a wall of iron about him in the hour of peril : he had heard their shout of defiance ring over the clash of arms and tumult of the fray—aye, and their shout of victory, too, louder than all, as they drove the broken and shattered forces of the enemy before them. Well, then, might the sight of that tented host send the flush of pride to the monarch's brow, and fill his heart with exultant feelings.

But, alas, no color came to that marble cheek : pale and anxious the chieftain sat and gazed, his brow knit in gloomy thought, and

care resting like a cloud upon his countenance. No food had passed his lips all day, yet something more than fasting had wrought that haggard look and bowed that regal head. The white tents sprinkling the field, the chariots beside them, the shining ranks of warriors, the triumphant strains of music, the glorious landscape smiling in the setting sun, the hum of the mighty army, were all unheeded. He saw them not, he heard them not; his troubled soul was busy amid other scenes, struggling with far other thoughts. The past and the future shut out the present. Another army arose before him—a host of sins in ghastly array, in whose dread aspect no relenting could be seen. And worse than all, the oracles of God were dumb—to his earnest questioning no response had been given; the Urim and Thummim ceased to be irradiated at his call, and silence and darkness rested on the ark of God. And now as

he thought of his crimes, and the silence of God, and of the battle on the morrow,

“Coming events cast their shadows before,”

and he saw his army routed and slain, and himself and his throne trampled under foot. No wonder the waving banners below him brought no glow to his wan and wasted features. No wonder his troubled spirit cast about for some relief from the darkness that was gathering so fast over his head, until he, as a last resort, could rashly invoke the dead prophet from the eternal world to help him.

As the last light of day disappeared, and the fires began to be kindled in the broad encampment, he entered his tent, and putting on a disguise, stole forth, and turning his steps towards the house of a sorceress, entered and asked that Samuel might be raised from the dead.

## THE INTERVIEW.

Scarcely had his request been made, when a stately form arose before him clad in a dark mantle, his long grey locks and beard falling upon his breast and shoulders. It was Samuel—the same Samuel who had anointed him king over Israel, and for so long a time been the pillar of his throne; the dread and fearless prophet who so often had withstood him to his face and hurled the malediction of heaven upon him,—whose last curse, backed with the startling declaration, “*The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent,*” still rang in his ears. The frightened monarch stood dumb and powerless before the dread spirit he had evoked from the land of shadows, when the deep sepulchral tones of the prophet broke the silence, “**WHY HAST THOU DISQUIETED ME TO BRING ME UP?**” “*I am sore distressed,*” humbly murmured the king, “for the Philistines make war upon me,

and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor dreams : therefore have I called thee that *thou* mayest tell me what I shall do." " *Wherefore,*" answered the spirit, "*dost thou ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from thee and is become thine enemy ?*" He then repeated over again the curse of former days, and his words fell like a funeral knell on the ears of the monarch, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thy hand, and given it to thy neighbor David." Not only has the throne gone, but the dynasty closes with thee, and thy family is disinherited forever for thy sins. Nor is this all: the battle to-morrow shall go against thee, for, "the Lord will deliver Israel *with thee* into the hands of the Philistines ; and"—the prophet's voice here made the heart of the listener stand still in his bosom—" *and, to-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.*" The thunderbolt had fallen, and the utter silence that followed was broken only by

the sound of the king's body as it struck heavy and lifeless on the earth. No shriek, no groan, told when and how deep the blow struck; that heavy fall was more startling than language.

The fearful apparition then sunk slowly away, and Saul was left alone with the night.

The next morning found the king in his tent, nerved for the worst; and to those who saw him, as his servants buckled on his armor, he appeared the same as ever, save that a deeper pallor was on his cheek than thought can ever give,—the pallor of despair. Nevertheless, the trumpets were ordered to sound, and soon the plain shook with the preparation of arms. Chieftains, each with his retainers behind him, marched forth,—prancing steeds and chariots of war followed, banners and lances and helmets fluttered and flashed in the morning sunlight, and all was hope and confidence in the army.

As the troops defiled before the royal tent, shouts of "Long live the king" rent the air. Ah, with what a sudden death-chill those shouts fell upon his heart; that host was going forth to be slaughtered, and that bright sun in its course was to witness the loss of his army, his throne, his sons, and his life. Perhaps he strove to cheer his desponding spirit with the vain hope that God might yet be appeased, or that Samuel had spoken falsely; at all events he was determined to battle nobly for his crown. As his guard closed sternly around him, the determination written on his brow betokened a bloody day, and a fierce struggle even with fate itself.

The hostile armies met, and rank after rank, troop after troop, rushed to the onset. The Hebrew sword drank blood; and the shout of Israel went up thrilling and strong as it ever rose from Mount Zion itself. And never before did their monarch lead them



so steadily and fiercely on; or give his royal person so freely to the foe. But courage, and heroism, and desperate daring were alike unavailing; the sentence was writ on high, and Israel was scattered before her foes. Vainly did their leaders rally them again and again to the charge. Vainly did the three princes, the sons of Saul, call on their followers to emulate their example, as they threw themselves on the advancing ranks. Vainly did the king himself lead on his troops, while the blood from his wounded side trickled over his armor. God was against them all; and discomfited and scattered they fled on every side. The three sons of the king fell one after another, bravely battling for their father's throne and Israel's honor, till at last Jonathan, the bravest and noblest of them all, fell lifeless on the hill-side. The wounded monarch, hard hit by the archers, at last turned and fled for his life, but finding no way of escape,

he stopped and commanded his armor-bearer to stab him to the heart, "Lest," said the dying man, "these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me." His armor-bearer refusing to commit the horrid deed, he placed the hilt of his own sword upon the ground and fell upon it. The faithful servant followed his example, and he and the king and his three sons lay corpses together on the mountain of Gilboa.

The prophecy was fulfilled, the curse had fallen, heaven was appeased, and morning, the morning of prosperity, once more broke on the land of Israel.



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## IX.

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### THE NAMELESS PROPHET.

THE hills and groves of Palestine, ever so beautiful to the traveller over its burning plains, were in olden times often selected as the building spots for altars and temples. The shadowy recesses gave solemnity to the imposing ceremonies of the priest, while the breezes that wandered through them bathed in refreshing coolness the silent worshippers that gathered there.

In one of these delicious groves, on a beautiful day, a royal form was seen standing before a magnificent altar, around which stood images and vessels of gold in costly profusion. Clad in splendid apparel, he re-

mained a moment contemplating the smoke of the incense, as it curled slowly upward, while the dense throng around darkened every avenue that led away in the distance. That royal personage was the head of the rebel house that had usurped the throne of David, and drawn every tribe but Judah after its banner. To complete his scheme of wickedness, he had made gods of gold, and plunged the people into the vices of idolatry. He knew that if they revered the God of Israel, their hearts would soon yearn again towards the house of David.

With his honors fresh upon him, and feelings of pride and triumph swelling his heart, he gazed long and earnestly at the smoking altar, when suddenly a shadow darkened the ground before him. With a quick and angry glance, he looked up to see who had dared thus presumptuously to intrude on his devotions. A grave, stern man, wrapped in a mantle, stood beside him, with his eye fixed

steadfastly upon the altar. Paying no heed to the haughty monarch by his side—not even deigning him a glance—showing no reverence to the gods before him, he calmly, sternly surveyed the gorgeous fabric with its unholy sacrifice. Before the king could recover his astonishment at this strange and sudden apparition, a voice broke the silence. Apparently unconscious of the presence of the king and his menials, wholly absorbed with the altar before him, he addressed it as if it were a living thing, “*O altar, altar! thus saith the Lord, a child from the house of David, Josiah by name, shall yet sacrifice upon thee, and his offerings shall be these high priests that now burn incense, and men’s bones shall be burnt upon thee. The Lord hath said it, thou shalt be rent, and the ashes poured out.*” The altar alone received his malediction, but the denouncing curse was meant for the king who worshipped there. It was a bold and fearful act, for he stood alone

amid a throng of menials, who needed but the slightest signal to hew him in pieces. The monarch's astonishment gave way to uncontrollable rage at being thus defied and cursed by an unknown and powerless man; and he sprang forward to seize him. In an instant, the outstretched hand fell withered by his side, and the altar parted in the middle, and the ashes were poured upon the ground. As suddenly as astonishment had given way to rage, did fear usurp the place of both; and the king, who a moment before was bent on taking his enemy's life, now tremulously begged for mercy. He besought him to restore the withered arm that hung lifeless at his side. Prayers and tears effected what threats could never have done; and the heart that seemed made of iron—so cold, and relentless, and fearless did it beat amid his foes—was instantly filled with the tenderest sympathy, and he restored to the humbled monarch his arm.



In the fullness of his delight and gratitude, the king invited him to his palace and to his table, offering to load him with gifts. But the nameless prophet refused, declaring that he could not accept either his hospitality or his presents, on any conditions; for the Lord had charged him saying, "Eat no bread nor drink water, nor turn again by the way thou camest." So he departed.

The singular appearance of this unknown man—his boldness—the fearful doom he had pronounced, and the miracles he had wrought, filled the beholders with amazement, and the news soon spread on every side. Among others, the sons of an old prophet of the Lord brought the tidings to their father's ears, who instantly saddled his ass, and pursued after him—determined to know more of one who had uttered so dreadful a malediction, and shown such high authority for it. He found him sitting by the way-side, under a spreading oak, doubtless musing on the

mission he had just fulfilled, and the Being who had sent him on it.

The old prophet began immediately to urge the stranger to go back and eat with him. But the latter replied to him as he had to the king, that it was the explicit direction of the Lord that he should not eat bread nor drink water in that place. Finding all his entreaties of no avail against the command of the Almighty, he changed his plan, and told him that he too was a prophet of the Lord, and added, "an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water." "*But he lied unto him.*" This staggered the stranger, and though he thought it singular that the Lord should send two such contradictory messages, still, one of his prophets, a venerable and revered man, would not tell a lie. What questions he put, and what falsehoods the old prophet uttered to sustain the first un-

truth, we are not told. The whole question hinged on the single fact, whether God had altered his commands. It doubtless was with many misgivings that he at length admitted that it might be so, and consented to return.

As he reined his unwilling beast back, methinks his heart felt a sudden chill, and a gloomy foreboding darkened his spirit. *Perhaps* that story was false, and he was provoking the curse of that God, whom, he would rather perish than disobey.

The two prophets, however, were at length on their way back, and a venerable pair they were as they rode side by side, and conversed of those high themes which related to God and the fate of Israel. As the old prophet spoke of the revelations that from time to time had been made to him—of his solemn interviews with the Almighty, the heart of the stranger must have felt relieved of its doubts; and the fearful misgivings

which would ever and anon shake his soul, departed. This *was* a man of God and had been sent to hasten his return.

At length they reached the old prophet's home, and entered his humble dwelling. Their beasts were unsaddled, and the anxious and officious host ordered dinner to be spread, to which he sat down with his guest. In the midst of pleasant cheer, and still pleasanter conversation, the hours wore rapidly on. The old prophet exerted all his powers to give zest to the entertainment; and for once disobedience seemed about to be crowned with blessings.

But suddenly—at the very moment when they felt most secure—a strange light illumined the old prophet's face and flashed in fearful splendor from his eye. The Spirit of the Almighty—the *true* inspiration—had entered him, and rising up before his astonished guest, who sat watching with the intensest anxiety this sudden change, he cried

aloud; "*Thus saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment he gave thee, but camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place where he did say to thee, eat no bread and drink no water, thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers.*" Had a thunderbolt suddenly fallen at the feet of the prophet, he could not have been more astounded. On his own confession his guest had lied to him; and now at his own table pronounced the curse upon that disobedience of which he himself had been the author.

With a fallen countenance and a heavy heart, the doomed man saddled his ass and rode away. With his head bowed on his bosom, and his long beard sweeping his garments, he passed slowly along, heedless of all the objects around him. Weary and heavy was the way; for he knew the light of his dwelling would never more cheer his

eyes, nor the voices of those he loved fill his heart with delight. By the road-side his rejected body must be thrown, to be devoured, perchance, by the dogs, and worse than all, the stigma of a wicked prophet be fixed on his name forever. Oh! who can tell the sorrow that then wrung his bosom, or the agonizing prayer to the God of his fathers which then arose from his crushed and broken spirit.

While he was thus passing sadly along, a lion sprang upon him, and slew him. But held by an invisible hand from touching his prey, he, together with the ass, stood and watched over the corpse. Travellers turned in wonder from the strange spectacle of a lion and ass keeping harmonious and solemn watch together over a dead body, and brought the news to the city. The old prophet knew at once that it was the victim he had seduced to his ruin; and filled with remorse and pity, hastened to the

spot. Finding the corpse stretched on the earth, he took it carefully up, and placing it on his own beast, brought it to his house. A few hours before, the two had passed over that road together in friendly conversation, and now they came again, the living bearing the dead. Mourning over it with tears that came too late, the survivor cried, "*Alas, my brother!*" And well he might, for that pale face in its death-stillness, uttered a reproach more touching than language; and all the ghastly wounds, "with their dumb mouths," pleaded like angels against the murderer. "*Take him,*" said the stricken prophet, "*and lay him in my grave, and when I am dead, then bury me in the same sepulchre: lay my bones beside his bones.*" Let the same sepulchre enclose us, and let the monument that tells of the disgrace of the one perpetuate the falsehood and crime of the other. It was all that he could do by way of atonement; and one tomb held the victim and the seducer. No

name crowned the resting place of the stranger ; he was known only as the " man of God," and for ages his sepulchre was the sepulchre of " **THE NAMELESS PROPHET.**"

A fearful lesson this, to those who would forsake the command of God for the declarations of man.





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X.

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**THE DREAM AND ITS FUL-  
FILLMENT,**

OR, JACOB AND JOSEPH

THERE is nothing in the whole range of history or romance so full of strange occurrences and touching incident, as the simple story of Joseph. He was the son of Rachel, whom Jacob always designated by the appellation, "*My wife*"—the *other* was none of his choosing, and hence had none of his love. As was natural, after the death of his wife, his affection all concentrated in her two children. Joseph was the eldest, and beautiful as he was brave and good. The old man could not conceal his partiality for the boy, and lavished

on him the choicest presents in his power to bestow, and decked him out in a gay coat,—thus selecting him from all his brethren to receive the special marks of his favor. Their hatred and envy on this account were greatly augmented, when he, in his innocence, related two dreams—one in which their sheaves stood up around his sheaf and made obeisance to it; and the other, where the sun, moon and stars did him reverence;—the only interpretation of which was, that he should be lord over his brethren, and honored even by his father.

So, once, while pasturing their flocks in Shechem, seeing Joseph—who had been sent by his father to inquire after their welfare—approaching, they said: “Here comes this dreamer; let us finish him at once, and see what will become of his dreams.” Reuben interfered, on the ground that it was monstrous to shed the boy’s blood, and persuaded them to fling him into a pit, doubtless with a view to liberate him privately. When

the unsuspecting Joseph was first made to comprehend the full extent of the wrong meditated against him, he could hardly believe it true. But as they harshly stripped off his parti-colored coat, and roughly dragged him towards the mouth of the pit, he could no longer doubt, and begged most piteously for life. He besought them by the ties of brotherhood, for their father's sake, for *pity's* sake, not to cast him alone down that fearful abyss. His prayers and tears were alike unavailing, and they thrust him harshly into the dark entrance, and his agonizing shrieks gave way to low moans of despair.

At length, however, seeing a company of Ishmaelites passing by, they concluded to sell him. Then dipping his coat in the blood of a kid, they took it back to their father, saying; "We found this in the field, all bloody and torn, as you see it;—is it Joseph's?" "Yes," replied the afflicted father, "it is Joseph's: a wild beast has devoured

him." And he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and mourned bitterly. All his friends endeavored to comfort him, but he repelled their sympathy, declaring he would go broken-hearted to his grave.

In the meantime, Joseph was taken to Egypt, and sold to one of the officers in the king's army. It is not common for the Bible to stoop to compliment one's personal appearance, but it says that "Joseph was a goodly person, and well-favored." Possessed of a fine, noble form, and handsome face, his manly beauty awoke the passions of his master's wife, and she persecuted him with base proposals. Finding all her approaches repelled; her love turned into hatred, and with a lie too infamous to be placed in the catalogue of ordinary crimes, she charged him with assaulting her person. Hurling from his place of trust, and cast into prison without leave to defend himself, he suffered not only the miseries of a dungeon for two years, but the

mortification of knowing that his character was ruined—his truth and virtue all gone in the eyes of the world. Ah! his brothers were right enough in calling him “a vain dreamer.”

His little role is played out, and the great world of strife and toil moves on without his prison walls, and he is forgotten forever. Thus might he reason: but the sleepless eye of One above human events did not forget him. Pharaoh must have a troubled dream, and Joseph be the only one to interpret it. From the hard floor of a dungeon he mounts to the chariot of Pharaoh; and the neglected prisoner of a captain of the guard becomes first lord of all Egypt. Ah! when that false woman saw him in the king's chariot, invested with regal power, how she must have trembled for herself and husband. The man she had basely maligned and imprisoned was now where he could strike *any* enemy down. His hour of revenge had come; and

in the suspense she endured day after day, expecting her exposure and humiliation, she received the punishment of her crime. But Joseph cast her from his memory as he would a reptile from his path, and bent all his energies during the seven years of plenty to hoard enough for the seven years of famine that were to follow. Why, in the plenitude of his power and success he never sent to his father, to tell him of his existence and prosperity, we are not informed. Nor does it matter;—we only know that the complicated plot was not to end thus. That he thought of his father and his home—that he wished to know if he were still alive, and feared that he might die before he could weep on his neck, may well be imagined.

But time passed on, and by long famine the land was withered up,—the crops failed, and the hoarded grain of the years that had passed was exhausted.

It is then, when the sons of Jacob came to



Egypt to buy corn, that we, for the first time, begin to see how the tangled web of events is to be unravelled, and catch a glimpse of the way the riddle is finally to resolve itself.

Those envious brothers stand in presence of the lord of Egypt without recognizing him. *He* has changed since they tore him from their side, and dragged him shrieking to the pit. The beautiful boy has become the well-developed and noble man; and clothed, not in "a coat of many colors," but in the royal apparel of the chief man in the realm, he looks himself, "every inch a king." But the shepherds of Shechem have not so changed—they look just as they did when he plead beseechingly for life, and he recognizes them at a glance. He has not forgotten the unspeakable anguish of the last moment in which his eyes fell upon them. As he turned to them one after another, in his touching prayer for mercy, the face of each became daguerretyped on his heart forever. *He knows them*, and speaks harshly

to them—they are spies—they are anything but honest men.

When, to repel this charge they honestly told their history, and spoke of their family—referring to Joseph as dead, and Benjamin as with their father,—he declared, by the life of Pharaoh, that he would not believe them, unless they brought that younger brother down. He imprisoned them three days and then released them, on condition that one should remain bound with him, as surety that the rest should return with Benjamin. He spoke to them in Egyptian, and they, supposing he did not understand Hebrew, conversed with each other in an under-tone. Remorse and self-reproach had at length awoken, and they said: “This is the punishment for having treated our brother Joseph so. We saw his anguish when he plead with us, but would not hear; and now his blood is required of us!” This was striking a tender chord in Joseph’s breast, and calling back a



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whole world of associations. In a moment, Egypt, and Pharaoh's court, and his own glory, all disappeared from sight, and he saw only his father's white tent and the sweet fields of Canaan. Nature tugged heavily at his heart-strings, and the choking sensation in his throat told him that his self-control was fast vanishing before the swelling tide of fraternal and filial love, and he retreated hastily to his room. There giving vent to his emotions in sobs and tears, he washed himself and returned.

When they again arrived at home, and told their father what had happened, the old man's fears were aroused, and he exclaimed, "Ye have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is dead, and Simeon gone, and now ye will take away Benjamin also. All these things are against me. He shall not go; for if any mischief befall him, you will bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave." Not to save Simeon will he risk Benjamin. They ceased

entreating, and waited to see how the famine would affect him.

The little ruse the old man practised some time after,—so natural, and yet so easily detected,—lets us into his character at once. After days and weeks had passed away, and want began to stare him in the face, he spoke in the most ordinary, indifferent manner, as if the whole affair of Benjamin had been forgotten—indeed was not worth being referred to again, saying, “Go down into Egypt and buy more corn.” “No;” said Judah, “we cannot, we *will* not go without Benjamin.” With the petulance and unreasonableness of old age, when it finds its structure of straw, reared with so much pains and cunning, suddenly demolished, he exclaimed, “Why did you tell him that you had a brother? Why deal so ill with me?”

It was useless, however, to contend with famine. Without corn, Benjamin and all

must die; and the troubled patriarch, after receiving the solemn oaths of his sons to bring him back, at last consented. To bless him and send him away, was a task almost too great for his strength. Joseph was long since dead, Rachel was dead, and Simeon a captive. The boy Benjamin—the child of his old age—the only relic of the wife he had so long and so deeply loved—the last nestling on the roof-tree to cheer the evening of his days—the only object that made the world bright to him, must then go to a foreign land, to meet, perchance, the fate of Simeon and of Joseph. How the dotting father, when he found he could no longer shrink from the fatal blow, grasped at everything that could add to the security of his child! “Take,” said he, “the choicest fruits of the land, and carry them down to the man as a present; and a little balm, and a little honey, and spices, and myrrh, and nuts, and almonds.” Perhaps when he sees these

little presents from the old man, he will pity his loneliness and be kind to his boy.

At length, after having done all within his power, he shook off, by a strong effort, the anxious parent, and rising to the dignity of the man of God, said; "Go, and God Almighty give you mercy before the man. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

The light of his heart, the joy of his life, is at length gone. The patriarch stands in the door of his tent—his white locks falling on his shoulders—and watches the fair form of his boy receding in the distance, until at last a clump of trees shuts him from sight. Even then he does not turn away, but lingers a long time, gazing with an ashen cheek and tremulous lip on the spot where he last saw his idol; and then bows himself in prayer to the God of his fathers. Oh how he laid before him the promises he had

made—how he pressed the pledge that had been given.

Wearily and sadly passed the days to Jacob; the nestling was gone from his bosom—the light of his tent departed. That tent was now desolate; the whole world looked lonely; his very herds moved sorrowfully over the fields; the sky, the clouds, the earth had suddenly changed their aspect.

While Jacob and his sons are in this state of ignorance and suspense, it is pleasant to turn to Joseph, who alone manages the whole plot. But he had overestimated his self-control; for when his brethren again stood before him, and gave him the presents and money of his father, and he saw Benjamin with them, his heart beat with a violence that mocked the mandates of his will. That beautiful boy, with his open, affectionate countenance, was "*his mother's son*," his only brother, and his whole nature reached forth

towards him. He could only say, "*Is this the brother of whom you spake! God be gracious to thee, my son!*" and rushed out of the room to hide the tears that could not be stayed. In the solitude of his chamber, he relieved his burdened heart, and returned with a composed mien into their midst. He had the whole of them with him at dinner; yet, even here, his love which clamored so loudly for expression, could not help revealing itself. He piled on Benjamin's plate—boy though he was—five times as much as on any of the others. The look of innocent wonder with which he met this extravagance, again and again brought tears into Joseph's eyes. Ah! how blind they were not to see that he was *devouring* that child with his looks, and that every motion was an effort to restrain himself from snatching him to his bosom.

Having passed this trial safely, he sent them away with their sacks full of corn—



ordering the steward to put the silver cup into Benjamin's sack, and then, as soon as they had left the city, to pursue after and charge them with stealing it. He did so, and the brothers knowing themselves innocent, bade him search, saying that he in whose sack it was found, should be his lord's bondman for ever. Beginning at the eldest, he opened one sack after another with the same success, until at last none but Benjamin's remained. All anxiety had now ceased on their part, for they knew that little Benjamin could not steal. It was a mere matter of form, opening *his* sack; but lo! the first object that met their astonished eyes, was that glittering cup. Alas, alas, they had just been congratulating themselves on their good fortune. With plenty of corn, and Benjamin with them, they were on their return route to their father. Their fears had all given way to delightful contemplations, when their hopes were thus suddenly

dashed, and Benjamin, on their own conditions, was to be a bondman for life. With rent clothes and despairing hearts they returned to the city, and prostrating themselves before their lord, made no excuse, but offered themselves at once as his slaves. This was all he could ask, and the worst was over. Not so. Joseph declared he would have none but the culprit—the rest might return to their father. What, go back without Benjamin! Such an alternative was worse than death, and Judah roused himself to one desperate effort to avert the catastrophe. Rising and approaching Joseph, he begged him not to be angry, but hear him: he then commenced a most tender, touching appeal to his feelings and his affections. Ah *that was quite unnecessary*; poor Benjamin, as he stood silent and wretched, the innocent cause of all this misery, the tears trickling down his cheeks, was making that appeal with ten thousand tongues, till Joseph him-

self turned paler than his brethren. But swallowing down by a convulsive effort his rising emotions, he stood with compressed lips, and knitted brow and heaving chest awaiting the issue. Judah then went on to remind him that he had questioned them of their father and family; and when they had honestly told him all—even of their brother Benjamin, that he had commanded them to bring him down to Egypt. Said Judah, “I told my father this, but he would not let him come. And when he besought us again to go and buy food we refused, unless Benjamin accompanied us. He replied, you know my wife bare me two sons, and one went out from me, and was torn in pieces for I have never seen him since; and now if you take this one away also, and mischief befall him, you will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.” In this simple and earnest manner, he went on pleading for his aged father, and for Benja-

min, and in such touching language, that the heart of a stranger would have melted. Joseph listened to the recital—saw the picture Judah drew of his father, and when he came to speak of how dearly that father still loved his long-lost son Joseph, and the sorrow and wretchedness that now threatened his declining years, he could no longer restrain himself. The swelling tide of feeling that had so long been kept back, now rushed the wilder for the force that had been laid upon it, and he cried with a loud voice, “*let every man leave me;*” and he stood alone with his brothers. He then burst into a passionate fit of weeping, and sobbed so loud and convulsively, that the court of Pharaoh heard him. After the first gust of feeling had passed by, he exclaimed, “*I am Joseph, doth my father yet live?*” Had the earth suddenly opened under their feet, they could not have been more astounded, and they stood silently looking on each other, while con-

sternation, shame, remorse, and hope, agitated them by turns. But there was no place in Joseph's bosom for anger, and he endeavored to console them by saying it was all for the best that they had sold him. God had ordered it aright. He then snatched Benjamin to his bosom, and covered him with caresses, and the two brothers lay a long time in each other's embrace weeping.

All this time Jacob was counting the days that should bring Benjamin back, and when at last the little caravan heaved in sight, how his heart beat as he saw him riding safely in the midst. While in the fullness of his joy at his safe return, he was told by Judah that Joseph was yet alive and was lord of Egypt. The shock liked to have proved too much for his aged frame—the blood sallied back to his heart and he fainted. When he at length revived he said “It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go down and see him before I die.” And he did go

down, and Joseph came in his chariot to meet him. Of that interview we cannot speak. An aged father taking to his bosom a long buried son, and a noble son murmuring on that bosom in the midst of his tears, "*my father, my father,*" answered only by the tremulous "*God bless thee, my son,*" is one of the holiest sights this earth presents. The rapture of that moment compensates for years of pain. The Bible says that Joseph "*wept on his neck a good while.*" How simple the declaration and yet how full of meaning. "*A good while,*" yes the garnered affection of years, the hoarded treasures of the heart, all it had suffered and all it had hoped were not to be uttered in a short embrace.

*Thus was the double dream fulfilled.*

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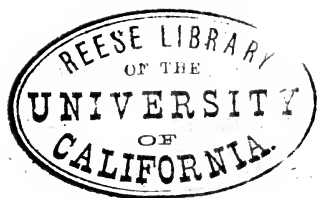
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## XI.

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### **THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.**

LATE one night, when all was still around a rude hostelrie in Judea, save perchance, the rippling of the wind through the tree-tops, a young mother gave birth to a son. She was one of a company of poor travellers who had taken up their night lodgings in the stable. Such a birth was no uncommon thing among the poorer classes, and yet heaven never bent over a universe just rolled into being, with such intense, absorbing interest, as it did over that unconscious babe, as it lay with feeble, fluttering breath upon its mother's bosom. The heavens were quiet above—the inmates of the low inn slumbered

peacefully—the shepherds were dreaming free from care amid their flocks on the fresh hill-sides, and all nature was at rest, when the birth-throes of that fair young mother brought troops of angels from the throne of God.

But suddenly a change seemed to pass over nature—mysterious influences were in the air—the slumberers on the hill-side and in the valley, felt a strange unrest, and arose, and came forth to gaze on the sky. Whispers were about them, and sounds like the passage of swift wings, all sweeping onward to one place; and then on the darkness of night a new star arose, bathing the landscape in mellow splendor, and flooding that rude inn and ruder stable with light that dazzled the beholder. There it stood, beautiful and bright, pointing with its steady beam to that slumbering babe. Encompassed in the still glory, the wondering shepherds turned in alarm one to the other, but saw in the shin-

ing countenance of each, only cause of greater fear. While they thus stood hesitating what to do, an angel hovered above them, saying, "*Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord:*" and suddenly crowds on crowds of radiant beings swept round them, singing, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.*" Oh, how that glorious anthem rose and fell along the Judean mountains. "Glory to God in the highest!" from voices tuned in heaven for ages to melody, and sent up in one exultant shout from that excited host, burst again and again on the ear. The heavens trembled with the song, and far away, beyond the reach of watching shepherds, or listening men, were louder shouts, and more entrancing melody.

With that shout and that song on their lips, the host of glad angels wheeled away

to heaven, and all was still again. But still that star kept shining on, and the shepherds from the hill-tops, and wise men from afar, guided by its finger of light, came to where its beam fell on the infant in the manger, and worshipped him there. Strange occupants were in that stable. The wise and proud were there kneeling. Angels had been there adoring. The Son of God was there sleeping in a human mother's arms. That stable was greater than the palace of a king, for its manger cradled the "King of Kings:" "Emmanuel, The Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Redeemer," Saviour of men, were all embraced in that helpless infant. There it lay, calm and fair and lovely, the companion of cattle, and yet the Maker of the earth, and the adored of heaven—the son of a carpenter, and the "Son of God." The feeble arm could scarcely lift itself to its mother's neck, yet on it the universe stood balanced. Its voice was faint,

low, and infantile, and yet at its slightest cry, myriads on myriads of angelic beings would flock to its relief. A few hours measured its existence, and yet it lived before the stars of God. Born to die; it was still the conqueror of death. No wonder that star beamed on its face, for it did more than declare its heavenly birth, or direct the wise men to where it was cradled. It was pointing to the great solution of the problem of life, and of the profoundest mystery of heaven. For four thousand years the world had summoned its thought and energies, and exhausted its wisdom on the single question, "*How shall man be just with God?*" The smoke of the first altar-fire kindled on the yet unpeopled earth, as it curled slowly heavenward, was burdened with this question. From the borders of deserted Eden—from the top of Mount Ararat—from the Bethel of Abraham, and from the tents of Jacob, had the sacrificial flame burned skyward in vain. The priests of Aaron

had stood before the altar, and struggled for ages with the mighty problem, and now the "Star of Bethlehem" pointed to that babe as its solution. The long wanderings of the Hebrews—the miracles that preserved them—the imposing ceremonies of their religion—the "ark of God," the "mercy-seat," the pomp of temple worship, what did they all mean? That silent star furnished the reply. Altars and sacrifices, prayers and prophecies, all were to end here. For four thousand years the earth had been rolling on its axis to bring about one event, and this was its accomplishment. To the thousand inquiries of the human heart—to its painful questionings—to all its hopes and fears for so long a period, it was the answer and the end. Like a shadow forever fleeing had the mystery of justification baffled both the thoughtful and inspired. The Hebrew with his temple worship and his offerings—the pagan with his heathen rites and his gods—the philosopher

with his reason and his conscience, and the poet with his imagination, had pondered for ages over it. Watchings and fastings, self-humiliation, long pilgrimages, self-immolation, and death had been cheerfully, nay, joyfully endured, to solve it. Too high for the rapt prophet, too deep for the sage, it still remained to sadden and excite the heart of man, till the "Star of Bethlehem" arose on the plains of Judea. Then the problem was solved and the mystery explained, by a mystery and problem greater than all.

The long line of David, unbroken through so many centuries, was maintained solely to secure the birth of that child. Rapt in holy enthusiasm, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and all the prophets of God had foretold a King of Israel yet to come, whose throne should excel all the thrones of earth; and in the sublimest strains of eloquence spoken of the glory of his kingdom and the splendor of his reign. Through ages of oppression—

through long years of captivity—from the depths of suffering, had prophets and people looked forward to the coming of this King and “Redeemer,” and now, as if to mock their hopes, that silent star pointed to the babe of a carpenter’s wife as the fulfilment of all.

Oh what a bitter disappointment to be told that the King of Glory—the Prince of Peace—the Redeemer of Israel—the hope of the human heart, were in that infant, coarsely clad and laid in a manger.

Yet that star said more than all this—to the longings after *immortality*—to the dim hopes—the painful, bitter cry of the human soul after a *life to come*, it still casts its dazzling rays on that rude manger. The sad soul may question on and struggle on; but the sleeper there alone can satisfy its desires. It may range the fields of thought—exhaust all learning and all philosophy—dive into its own unfathomed depths; yet there alone is



unfolded the mystery. “*Life and immortality* are brought to light” in that manger—so speaks the ever-beaming star. Kneel there with thy soul, which has fallen back exhausted from the fearful heights it has endeavored to climb unaided; fling thy philosophy, thy pride, as well as thy fears away, and let the light of that wondrous star fall on thy countenance, and its ray subdue and gladden thy spirit. Not only painful doubts and appalling fears lest the sinful heart could never be accounted pure—but those unsatisfied longings and shadowy visions of a life to come, are all over. Oh, with what thrilling eloquence that star spoke to the bewildered, melancholy race of man.

But not only did it point to the only way of justification, and reveal the life of the soul, when its earthly clog is cast away—it also shed light on the *grave of the body*—cast the first ray that ever fell within its dark and voiceless chambers. It said as it shone, “*Be-*

*hold the resurrection and the life:" "There is the first fruits of them that sleep."* Wondrous beam! penetrating to the caverned dead, casting unearthly splendor on the charnel house, and flooding with light and glory the mutilated fragments which the worm and corruption have left. To the "whole creation travailing in pain and groaning," waiting for the redemption of the body, it said in accents sweeter than ever yet fell on mortal ears, "Be still, that babe shall open the portals of death, and lead captivity captive."

To the heavens above, it also spoke a language—it solved the mystery of redemption—showed how Mercy and Justice could be united, and revealed the length, and breadth and depth, and height of the love of God.

Two great events mark the long history of the earth—one is the coming of Christ in a human form as the "babe of Bethlehem," to save and redeem—the other is to be his coming in the plenitude of his power to judge the

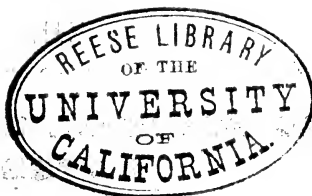
world. A single star arose and beamed on his birth: at his second appearance, the stars of heaven shall all be quenched, the sun be "turned into darkness and the moon into blood."

## XII.

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### THE DISCIPLE THAT JESUS LOVED.

THE lives of most men are on the same plane, marked by the same vicissitudes, checkered by the same light and shade, joys and sorrows. Kindred storms overhang their path; and passing through similar sufferings, they drop one like the other over the same brink into the echoless abyss of the grave. But now and then one appears, born to a different destiny. Thrown upon turbulent or rapidly changing times, he is impelled by a violence he cannot resist, along dizzy heights and down frightful gulfs, until the long martyrdom is brought to a close by a



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death which changes the fate of an empire. Another, from childhood, goes only from mystery to mystery; revelations from on high, spirit-voices ringing in his ears, and unearthly visions dazzling his eyes, keep his soul in a state of fearful excitement, now thrilling it with joy, and now making it shudder with fear. One half of *his* sky is always too bright for mortal eye to gaze upon, and the other half, black with thunder clouds piled on thunder clouds. Thus it was with the prophets and priests of old, and with the inspired apostles of Jesus Christ. They dreamed dreams, they saw visions, they heard "the lyres of angels and the whispers of friends," *they talked with God face to face.*

Most of those men chosen for such a high destiny, possessed characters of great energy and activity. John alone seemed made to love. Less fitted than Paul for the sterner struggles which accorded with the latter's nature, he wished ever to be reposing on the

bosom, or receiving the caress of his Friend and Master. Sentiment and sympathy predominated in him; he was a poet by nature, kind, generous, and full of emotion; and was happy only when surrounded by those he loved. Serene trust and immovable faith were his great virtues.

There is something inexpressibly touching in his attachment to Christ; there was an abandonment about it, such an utter forgetfulness of the whole world but him; and merging of all he wished or hoped for into the affection of that single bosom, that one can never in imagination behold his head resting upon it in childlike happiness, as if life had nothing more to give, without the deepest emotion.

There is a certain sadness connected with the attachment of two friends who have become so much to each other, that they divide the world in only two parts, "one where the loved object is, and one where it is not." It



is too intense for this life ; changes and separation will weaken it, or death disrupt it. But there is something sadder still in the attachment of Christ and John. The deep devotion, the pure and generous heart, the tender sympathy, the trusting, loving nature of the latter, had so won upon the Saviour, that every look he cast upon him was a caress, and every word he spoke, took the gentle tone of a mother addressing her child. John, absorbed by his attachment, his countenance by turns made tearful and joyous, at the kind words and glorious truths that fell from his Master's lips, seemed never to dream of approaching evil, of possible separation. Jesus, on the other hand, as he with his sorrowful face looked down upon him, leaning contentedly on his breast, thought of the future. With his human heart beating warmly for the true devoted friend thus reposing there, he could not but sigh, knowing, as he did, the trials and sufferings his tender

nature must yet pass through to prove its love for him. That implicit confidence and trust were the strongest appeal that could be made to his pure and noble nature, and he must in those moments have looked upon John, as a mother upon the smiles of her infant, when she knows that in a few hours the executioner's axe will leave it an orphan in the world. The dark hints he ever and anon threw out, filled John with wonder, rather than anxiety, and he loved on, indifferent to his own fate. The other disciples respected this attachment, and far from being jealous, seemed affected by it. When Christ uttered those sad words, "*One of you shall betray me,*" they dared not ask which it was, but requested John, who they knew would not be rebuked, to do it for them. *He*, looking up from that pillow he *could* not surrender to any other head, said, "*Lord, who is it?*" and the Saviour told him. The youngest of all, a

mere youth when he began to follow Christ, he was yet most beloved of all.

John must have passed through strange states of mind, as the wondrous character of the being he loved so intimately and treated so familiarly, became revealed to him in his miracles and by his high claims. Christ seems always to have chosen him for a companion when about to accomplish any great event. John heard his predictions respecting Jerusalem and the Jewish nation; stood by when he took the hand of the dead daughter of Jairus, and bade her arise amid her astonished friends; was one of the three who ascended the mount of Transfiguration, and saw the face and form he had so often caressed, assume the likeness and splendor of God; was in the garden on that night of fearful agony, and gazed on the pallid face streaked with blood which had so often and so kindly smiled on him; and last of all, beheld him

ascend into heaven, triumphant over death and the grave.

But there is one event which gives John peculiar claims to being "*that disciple whom Jesus loved.*" Christ had endured the agony in the garden; his sacred face had been spit upon; his cheek shamefully struck; the farce and insult of a trial endured; he had fainted under the cross as he struggled with it up the steep hill-side; and finally, with his frame strung to the point of extremest sensibility, he had been laid on the rough beams, and the bolts rudely crushed through his shrinking hands and feet; and thus, quivering and dying, was hung on high. Around him was the railing crowd, beside him a scoffing thief. All his friends had forsaken him and fled; and alone, all alone, he was left to wrestle with his doom. No, not quite alone, for nearer the cross than the taunting rabble stood his mother. It was *her child*, bleeding and dying there before her eyes, and what were the

scoffs and violence of those around her; aye, what was death itself compared to the throes of maternal anguish that shook her bosom. There, too, stood John, rivalling even the mother in love. He forgot he had a life to lose; he did not even hear the taunts that were rained upon him, nor see the fingers of scorn that were pointed at his tears; he saw only his dying friend and Lord, beheld but the bosom on which he had so often rested his head, heaving and swelling as though the heart would burst its confinement, and the brow on which peace ever sat like a white winged dove, contracted with agony unutterable. True to the last, pale as the suffering being before him, he stood and wept in speechless sorrow. Christ in the midst of his torture and in the midst of the stupendous scheme he was finishing at such a fearful price, cut off from earth, and just as heaven, too, was about to abandon him, and the frown of his Father was darkening over his spirit,

was struck with this matchless love. Although the last, the wildest wave that ever broke over his suffering soul was gathering for its flow, yet even then he gazed lovingly on those two faithful hearts, and his calm though failing voice reached their ears, and he said to his mother, "*behold thy son,*" and to John, "*behold thy mother.*" True-hearted disciple, faithful friend, take *my* place beside my mother; to *thy love*, so great for me, I can safely commit her. Oh! what a proof of confidence and attachment was that! So high an honor was never before paid human love. Oh! what an inheritance was that the Son of God gave him,—his mother and his affectionate confidence in the last hour of his suffering, and while standing on the portals of the eternal kingdom. No wonder that John after that took her to his own home, soothed her sorrows, nursed her declining years, and at last gently and sorrowfully laid her in the grave.

Years passed by, and changes and persecution came, but no change in the affection of John for his Master. Living in *his life*, he afterwards lived to make known his death and resurrection. Love seemed to supply the place of native energy, and he passed into Asia, preaching the gospel, and planting churches; until at length the hand of persecution reached him, also, and he was banished to a lonely island in the Ægean Sea.

How long he remained there we know not; silence and uncertainty rest on his history. Alone he trod the desolate beach, cheered by no voice, solaced by no companionship. He, whose happiness had consisted in laying his head on the bosom of his friend and Lord, was left without a friend. The monotonous dash of waves at his feet, the broad and boundless deep stretching away before him, the cry of the sea bird and the roar of the storm,—these were the only sights and sounds left to the lonely exile. Day after

day, and week after week, the same unvarying routine. The solitary walk on the shore, and still more solitary rest under an overhanging rock, filled up the measure of his employments. Ah, how sweet then was the remembrance of his long and affectionate interviews with Christ, how full of solace the words he had spoken—*so* full that the desert seemed peopled with angels, and the hoarse murmur of the sea sounded like an anthem of praise to God. As he stood and saw the sun go down on the deep, he remembered that just so it flashed over the sea of Tiberias, when Jesus fed the five thousand. As he looked up to the silent firmament, gorgeous with stars, he lived over again the strange night which he passed with Jesus on Mount Tabor, gazing on the same heavens; and when he pillowed his lonely head upon the sand, he thought with throbbing heart of him, “*who had not where to lay his head.*”

How long he lived thus in holy contempla-



tion, to prepare him for the wondrous revelations about to be made, we know not: but one Sabbath morning, as he was walking the desert island, filled with thoughts of the world to come, he heard a voice repeating in trumpet tones behind him, "I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST." Turning to meet the voice, he saw a form dread enough to appal the stoutest heart. A mantle wrapped it from the neck to the feet—the head and hair were white as wool, the eyes burned like fire, the feet shone like brass in a furnace, in his uplifted hand seven stars were blazing, his countenance was as the "*sun shining in its strength,*" and his voice like "*the sound of many waters.*" No wonder the overwhelmed exile fell on his face as a dead man, before this fearful form and aspect, and dared not lift his eyes again from the earth, till the same terrible voice bade him arise. Of the wondrous scenes that were then revealed to him, who can speak? The gates of hell and

heaven were flung open to his view. He saw the smoke that curtained the bottomless pit, and the city whose only light is the presence of the Lamb: but the speechless agony, the terrible conflicts, the appalling sights of the one, together with the splendors of the heaven of heavens, the throne and white-vested elders, the dazzling glory of the crystal sea and rivers of Paradise, the music of the harpers, the thrilling power of that loud hallelujah, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,*" as it rolled from ten times ten thousand tongues full on the throne of God and the Lamb, who can describe?

This strange interview, with its long train of mysterious and fearful visions, was at last ended; as was also the exile of John, and he smiled once more in the midst of his friends. But the scenes he had passed through did not change his nature; he was the same gentle, loving being as ever. Overflowing

with kindness and sympathy all things else seemed worthless in comparison.

And when the lamp of life burned dimly, and his trembling voice could hardly articulate, he still spoke of *love*. It is said he lived to be eighty years of age, and then, too feeble to walk, was carried into church on men's shoulders, and, though scarcely able to speak, would faintly murmur, "*Brethren, love one another.*" Affection was his life, and it seemed to him that the world could be governed by *love*.

### XIII.

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#### **THE PRODIGAL SON.**

AMONG the outline sketches in which the Bible abounds, none is more beautiful than that of the Prodigal Son. And as the great *principles* of the New Testament are left for man to elaborate, so its sketches are designed to be filled up by our imaginations.

Christ, in teaching the multitude, drew his illustrations from every day life, and from scenes with which all were familiar. Once, sitting on a hill-side with the multitude below him, he pointed to the lilies that filled the valley beneath with fragrance and beauty, to exemplify the ease with which God could clothe those who trusted in him. The man

with his lost sheep—the “sower going forth to sow”—the unjust steward, all were examples that appealed to their own experience or knowledge.

The Prodigal Son not only illustrates a great truth, but is a touching picture in itself. We are introduced to a rich man with two sons who are both grown to be men. The younger, of an ardent temperament, full of adventure and hope, becomes weary of the dull routine of a farmer's life, and pines for the excitement to be found in the gay world from which he is excluded. His restlessness so increases upon him, that he at length has the hardihood to ask his aged father to give him, at once, that portion of the property which will fall to him at his death. The kind old man has not the heart to refuse him; and feeling that in a few years he will be laid in his grave; and having no farther interest in life than to secure the happiness of his two sons, he divides the estate between them.

With a large fortune at his command, and his bosom throbbing high with hope, that younger son passes through the gate of his paternal home, and steps forth into the world—now for the first time open to him. Perhaps the tremulous farewell of his grey-haired father, his last kind advice, and tears of love and solicitude, and faint “God bless thee, my son,” for a moment damped his ardor, and made him feel how selfish he had been. Perhaps as he turned for the last time to catch a glimpse of the old homestead, the scenes of his happy childhood, and the quiet joys of his later years, came back on him with such power that he almost regretted the rash step which had separated him from them forever.

But the bright scenes that his imagination kindled in the future, soon drove these sad thoughts away. He travelled far and wide; and in the novel sights and new pleasures of a foreign land his home and his father were forgotten. His ample fortune gave him for a

time the means of gratifying his desires ; and the society of the gay and proud, the excitements of the revel, and the first keen relish with which the baser passions always tempt their victim on, made the former part of his life seem to him a blank, and filled him with scorn and pity for the dull monotony of his father's house. Entering on a life of sensual pleasure after he had reached manhood, its excitements were all the fiercer, and he surrendered himself to them with an abandonment which showed that he never dreamed they could cloy. But with the madness of such a life, came also its recklessness of the future, and the fortune which seemed exhaustless, fast melted away. With its disappearance, fell off also the friends on whom he had squandered it. Flattered by their praises, he had spent freely, and now in their desertion, he felt the first pang of his coming sorrows. His rich companions did not wish the society of one who was no longer able to meet their

extravagance, while those who lived by their wits, felt no hesitation in dropping a friend, who had shown himself so unable to take care of himself.

To what depth of *infamy* he sunk, we are not told ; but he reached the lowest state of poverty and want. Without money, without friends, without the means of earning a subsistence, he wandered about, not knowing whither he went. He would steal tremblingly to the door of the farmer's cottage, or herdsman's tent, and humbly beg a morsel of bread to allay the pangs of hunger ; and happy he deemed himself, if at night he found any covering but the sky. Suddenly snatched from the world of fashion and excitement in which he had moved—his pride humbled not only by his condition, but at the thought of having been duped by treacherous friends—indignant with himself and the world, and poor, and hungry, and wretched, he felt keenly that '*the way of the transgressor is hard.*'"



Yet he dared not return home in that miserable plight to become the bye-word of his neighbors and the scorn of all who knew him and his history, although the hand of misfortune pressed harder and harder upon him. Poor man ; to what an abyss of suffering he must have fallen, before he applied for the place of a *swine herd*.

Behold this proud young man of fortune, brought up in luxury, the companion of the great and fashionable, sitting in the field amid the swine—his splendid apparel exchanged for the squalid rags of the lowest menial—the ample saloon in which he had sat lord of the feast, for a wretched bundle of straw ; and him who poured out wine like water, and turned so often from the richest dainties with the disgust of satiety, longing to snatch the husks or pods from the mouths of the swine he was feeding. Ample time he had for reflection, but alas, memory planted his bed of straw with thorns. Self-cursing and loathing,

remorse, hatred, want, and suffering, were all that remained to him; and they made sad inroads on his once fine constitution and manly beauty.

But it was useless to beat against the prison walls of fate that hemmed him in, and at length his pride and passion gave way to softer feelings. His retrospect extended beyond his profligate life,—even to his father's house, and as the memory of his childhood's joys came back upon him, and the sweet fields through which he had so often wandered, rose once more before him, he bowed his head and wept. The consciousness, too, that, while the friends whom he had treated with kindness and liberality had repaid him with treachery; his father whom he had neglected and despised, still loved him tenderly, wrung his heart with the bitterest sorrow. Before such thoughts and such memories his hard, rebellious feelings gave way, and tears of penitence flooded his eyes. In the house of that kind fa-

ther was "bread enough and to spare," while he was perishing from hunger; and so humble and broken-hearted did he become, that he resolved to brave the scorn and mockery of his early friends, and go and fling himself, in all his wretchedness, at that father's feet, and beg permission to be his servant. In an outburst of grief he exclaimed: "*I will arise and go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*" Willing to become anything if he could only once more rest his weary head in his father's house, he was in the right state to be forgiven.

And he did arise and start for his home. Long and toilsome was the way. Without money, without food, and clothed in rags, he begged from door to door. Ah, little they knew who drove him roughly away, how heavily their taunts smote the heart that was breaking while it begged. As he staggered

on, the thought would flash like sudden lightning through his soul,—what if my father should drive me thus from *his* door—and a heavy groan told how dire would be the calamity. Still despair of help from any other quarter, and the wish to die, if die he must, at his father's feet, pleading for forgiveness, impelled him on.

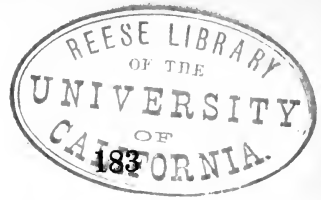
At length he began to approach his native village. The scenery around grew familiar to his eye—the outline of the hills he remembered well. He crossed the brook along the banks of which he had once strayed—the fields were the same as when he left. Ever and anon one whom he had known in better days would pass him by without noticing him. His rags and abject condition were better than any disguise, and he toiled wearily on, unknown to all.

How many associations thronged around him as he trod amid those familiar scenes. Memory was busy with the past, and for a

while he forgot the present in the rush of by-gone days over his heart. But when at last he saw the roof of his father's house above the tree-tops, his heart sunk within him, and his trembling limbs could scarcely support his frame. That father had heard of his profligacy and ruin; and in the oblivion that afterwards fell on his name, had read his death. How would he now receive him—oh, that the first dread interview were over.

Oppressed with these thoughts, and his brain reeling with the sudden rush of so many thousand things over him at once, he walked slowly up the long avenue that led to his home. While yet afar off, that aged father, who was sitting by the window to enjoy the cool air of evening, which gently lifted his grey hairs from his temples, saw the miserable object, that barefoot and slow, was approaching his house. In an instant the blood flowed back on his heart, for nature at once asserted her claims. What vestment of rags and squa-

lid appearance could ever deceive a parent's eye! It penetrates the deepest disguise; for a strong, mysterious sympathy unites him to his child which no outward obstacles can destroy. In that tattered outcast he saw his son, and forgetting everything else, he hurried forth to meet him. With outstretched arms, and the tears streaming from his eyes, he ran up to him, and falling on his neck, kissed him, mingling terms of endearment with every caress. The poor penitent began his confession and request to be a servant. But the overjoyed and doting parent interrupted him, and called out to his servants to "bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet." Make haste, too, said, he and "bring forth the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found." Overwhelmed and rendered speechless by this exhibition of love and tenderness,



### THE PRODIGAL SON.

the wretched profligate could only stand and weep before his father. A sad spectacle he was; for vice, and want and suffering had written more wrinkles on his brow than time—yet the fond father saw naught of these—he only beheld his lost child—felt him once more on his bosom as 'he strained him to his heart; and he was happy.

Music and joy were in the old homestead that night, and the returned prodigal was soothed and melted by turns. He seemed like one moving in a dream, so great and sudden had been the change in his condition. A few hours before, and he was an outcast and a beggar,—chased from every door, and devoured both by grief and hunger,—and now he was feasting amid his friends, the chief object of every one's regard. He could hardly believe the scene around him to be real, yet ever and anon, as he caught his father's look fixed upon him in absorbing tenderness, the whole swept over him with such overpowering

force, that he longed for a place where he might go and weep alone. The happiness of that night outweighed the misery of years, for he felt the full transport of forgiveness.

What a beautiful illustration of the kindness of our Heavenly Father, and what a picture of the joy over one returning sinner.



#### XIV.

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#### PAUL.

THE history of the world furnishes some few men who are like those mountain summits which repose in light while all below rests in deep shadow. To me, Moses, *independent* of the inspiration he received from heaven, is the grandest man the race has produced. Intellectually he towers above all before and after him. The level ray which should leave his forehead would gild but few brows on the earth. By it we might see the faces of Elijah, David, and Isaiah, but scarce another till we come to Paul.

Paul, in his natural character before his conversion, resembles Bonaparte more than

any other man, I mean both in his intellectual developments and energy of will. He had the same inflexibility of purpose, and utter indifference to human suffering when he had once determined on his course, the same tireless, unconquerable resolution, and fearlessness both of man's power and opinions, and that calm self-reliance and mysterious control over others. But the point of greatest resemblance is in the union of a strong, correct judgment, with rapidity of thought and sudden impulse. They decided quicker yet better than other men. The power, too, which both possessed was all *practical* power. There are many men of strong minds, whose force nevertheless wastes itself in reflection, or in theories for others to act upon. Thought may work out into language, but not into action. They will *plan* better than they can perform. But these two men not only *thought* better, but they could work better than all other men. I have made this

comparison because this great *practical* power is of rare occurrence. An astonishing head and an astonishing arm are seldom united.

The birth-place of Paul was well adapted to the formation of such a character as his. Born on the Mediterranean, with its broad and ever-heaving bosom before him, and an impenetrable barrier of mountains behind him, his mind naturally assumed a stern character and lofty bearing; and in his youth he exhibited those qualities which afterwards made him such a fearful and wonderful man. He had scarcely completed his studies, before he plunged into the most exciting scenes of those times. The new religion, professing to have the long promised Messiah for its founder, agitated the entire nation. To the proud young scholar, those ignorant fishermen, disputing with the doctors of law, and claiming for their religion a superiority over his, which had been transmitted through a hundred generations, and been sanctioned by

a thousand miracles and wonders, were objects of the deepest scorn. Filled with indignation, and panting for action, he threw himself boldly into the struggle, and became foremost in the persecutions that followed.

With a calm brow and an unflinching eye, he stood by, and saw Stephen stoned to death. Arrested by no obstacles, softened by no suffering, he roamed the streets of Jerusalem like a fiend, breaking even into the retirement of the Christian's home, dragging thence women and children, and casting them into prison. Though young in years, he had the nerve of a hoary-headed tyrant, and before his relentless will everything went down.

I have often wondered how his hatred and rage could hold out in his long journey to Damascus. The silence and solitude of nature, her quiet aspect and lovely scenes as he passed along, should have subdued, or at least allayed his hostility. Especially at

night, when he pitched his tent on some green hill-side, and saw the sun go down in a sea of green, and felt the balmy breeze of evening, redolent with the perfume of flowers, softly kissing his brow ; and later, perchance, listened to the note of the bulbul filling the moonlight with melody, it must have required nerves of iron to have resisted the soothing influences around him. Yet, young as he was, and hence peculiarly open to all the beauties of nature, he never seems a moment to have vacillated in his purpose.

The same self-control and perfect subjection of his emotions—even terror itself—to the mandates of his will, are exhibited in his conduct when smitten to the earth, and blinded by the light and voice from heaven. John, when arrested by the same voice on the isle of Patmos, fell on his face as a dead man, and dared not stir or speak till encouraged by the language, "*Fear not.*" But Paul, (or Saul,) though a persecutor, and violent man, showed

no symptoms of alarm or terror. The voice, the blow, the light, the glory, and the darkness that followed, were sufficient to upset the strongest mind ; but he, master of himself and his emotions, instead of giving way to exclamations of terror, simply said : “ *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?* ” With his reason and judgment as steady and strong as ever, he knew at once, that something was wanted of him, and ever ready to act, he asked what it was.

From this moment we cease to contemplate him in his natural character alone. When the persecutor becomes the persecuted, and the proud young scholar the humble despised disciple of Jesus of Nazareth ; and leaving the halls of the wise and proud, and companionship of dignitaries, casts his lot in with ignorant fishermen, he is a different being. His mental characteristics, his resolute will, fearless heart, and tireless energy, are the same ; but his moral nature, how changed !

From this time on, his track can be distinguished by the commotions about it, and the light above it. After communing a long time with his God in the solitudes of Arabia, in order to prepare himself for his great work, he went deliberately back to Jerusalem, from whence he had so recently come with letters to legalize his persecutions; and cast his lot in with those he had followed with violence and slaughter. His strong heart never beat one quicker pulsation through fear, when the lofty turrets of the proud city flashed on his vision. Neither did he steal away to the dark alleys and streets, where the disciples were concealed, and tell them secretly his faith in the Son of God. He strode into the synagogues, and before the astonished priests preached Christ and him crucified. He thundered at the door of the Sanhedrim itself, and shaking Jerusalem from limit to limit, kindled into tenfold fury the storm of persecution which already threatened his life. With assassins

dogging his footsteps, he at length left the city. But instead of going to places where he was unknown, and where his feelings would be less tried, he started for his native city, his father's house, the home of his boyhood, for his kindred and friends. To entreaties, tears, scorn and violence, he was alike impervious. To Antioch and Cyprus, along the coast of Syria to Greece and Rome, over the known world he went like a blazing comet, waking up the nations of the earth. From the top of Mars' Hill, with the gorgeous city at his feet, and the Acropolis and Parthenon behind him; on the deck of his shattered vessel in the intervals of the crash of billows, in the gloomy walls of a prison, on the borders of the eternal kingdom, he speaks in the same calm and determined tone. Deterred by no danger, awed by no presence, and shrinking from no responsibility, he moves before us like some grand embodiment of power. The nations heave around him, and



kings turn pale in his presence. Bands of conspirators swear neither to eat nor drink till they have slain him, rulers and priests combine against him, the people stone him; yet over the din of the conflict and storm of violence, his voice of eloquence rises clear and distinct as a trumpet-call, as he still preaches Christ and him crucified. The whip is laid on his back till the blood starts with every blow, and then his mangled body is thrown into a dungeon; but at midnight, you hear that same calm, strong voice which has shaken the world, poured forth in a hymn of praise to God, and lo! an earthquake rocks the prison to its foundations; the manacles fall from the hands of the captives, the bolts withdraw of themselves, and the massive doors swing back on their hinges.

Finding that the whip, the dungeon, the assassin's knife, and the executioner's sword cannot move him from his purpose, the world point in scorn to the cross, to signify that the

Christ he preaches, died the death of a felon. “*The cross, the cross,*” they sneeringly exclaim, to bring the blush of shame to his cheek ; but to their astonishment, they hear him shout louder than they all, “*The cross, the cross, I GLORY IN THE CROSS.*” On the very spot they have selected for his confusion, he plants himself, and with one arm around the emblem of disgrace, and the other pointed to heaven, he makes the hill of Crucifixion burn like the gates of Paradise. Nay more, he goes and stands by that felon’s tomb—Him they call a felon—and preaches the resurrection of the dead.

I can never in imagination behold him, with his somewhat diminutive form, his head slightly bald, nose aquiline, and eyes dark and flashing, in the presence of Felix, sweeping everything down in his torrent-like eloquence, without feeling my heart beat with quicker motion. In a gorgeous apartment, filled with the noble and the gay, who have

assembled from curiosity, he stands to defend himself against the charges of the orator Tertullus. He listens to the opprobrious epithets of "pestilent fellow," "ringleader of a sect of Nazarenes," "profaner of the temple," with a composed countenance, until bid to answer for himself. At first, calm, dignified, and respectful, he repels the accusations, then taking fire as he touches upon the loftier topic of the resurrection of the dead, he forgets all but the cause he advocates. But, especially, when Felix would hear farther, and he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come," does he rise before us like a being from another world. After explaining the law, its justice and purity, till the reason of his listeners is convinced, he speaks of its claims on man and on them—shows how sinful and corrupt they have been, then passes on to the judgment of the great day, and its just and fearful retributions.

As his imagination kindles on this stu-

pendous theme, all things else vanish from his sight—the noble audience before him, his bonds, imprisonment, and coming fate. Those massive walls sink away before the descending God; the Archangel's trumpet is heard; the dead come forth; the throne is set, and before it all the nations of the earth are gathered, awaiting their doom. Gone is the look of indifference and smile of incredulity; gone even the sneer of Tertullus; and solemn silence, broken only by the tones of the fearful speaker, reigns through the vast apartment. No wonder when he closed, the haughty Felix trembled.

But stern as Paul was amid his foes, and lofty in his course, he nevertheless had a heart full of the tenderest emotions. A *truer*, never beat in a human bosom. At times his natural fierceness would break forth, as when the High Priest ordered him to be smitten contrary to the law. Turning like a lion upon him, he thundered in his astonished

ears, "*God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.*" Yet he was ready in a moment to be just; and there never was before so fearless and inflexible a nature, joined with so much tenderness of heart. Look at his parting with his friends at Ephesus, when on his way to Jerusalem! How touching his address, and how characteristic. In closing he said, "And now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that *in every city bonds and imprisonment await me.*" "In every city," the same hard fate, "*yet none of these things,*" he says, "*move me, neither count I my life dear unto me,* so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." None of these things moved him—no, they were trifling matters, bonds, imprisonment and death; *duty*, the salvation of man, the honor of God, these alone filled him with anxiety, and nerved him to action. Of one

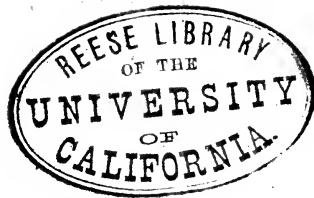
thing, however, he told them he was convinced, and that was, that they "*should see his face no more.*" To them he appealed as witnesses, that he had labored faithfully for their welfare, and then kneeling down on the shore, prayed with them. How often have I wished that that prayer had come down to us. One thing, however, I know, it was full of self-forgetfulness and fervent pleading for those who knelt around him. No wonder when it was finished, they fell on his neck and kissed him, "sorrowing most of all for the words, *they should see his face no more.*" It would be a long, long time before they could find another heart so brave and affectionate—one that would dare all things, and suffer all things for them. They doubtless besought him to stay with them, and be comforted by their sympathy and love. But no, though bonds and imprisonment awaited him in *every city* none of these things moved him. On to his fate, not sadly, not reluctantly, but se-

renely, *joyfully* he went, thinking only of fulfilling the ministry he had received. Firm, dignified and resolved, he took the path of duty, with an unfaltering step. No malice or threats of his foes could deter him from laboring for their welfare ; no insults prevent his prayer in their behalf ; no wrongs heaped on his innocent head keep back his forgiveness.

One cannot point to a single spot in his whole career where he faltered a moment, or gave way to discouragement or fear. Through all his perilous life, he exhibited the same intrepidity of character and noble spirit. With his eye fixed on regions beyond the ken of ordinary mortals, and kindling on glories it was not permitted him to reveal, he pressed forward to an incorruptible crown, a fadeless kingdom. And then his death, how indescribably sublime. Napoleon dying in the midst of the midnight storm, with the last words that fell from his lips a battle-cry, and his passing spirit watching in its delirium the

torn heads of his mighty columns, as they disappeared in the smoke of the conflict, is a sight that awes and startles us. But behold also Paul, a war-worn veteran, battered with many a scar, though in a spiritual warfare, looking back not with alarm, but transport; gazing not on the earth, but on heaven. Hear his calm, serene voice ringing over the storms and commotions of life: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." No shouts of foemen, nor smoke and carnage of battle surrounded his spirit struggling to be free; but troops of shining angels, the smile of God, and the songs of the redeemed; these guarded him and welcomed him home.









## XV.

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### FEEDING THE FIVE THOU- SAND.

To one who can escape the influences of early education, and free himself entirely from the views which constant and long familiarity with the acts and character of Jesus Christ has given, his history will seem a dream and a fable. From the time when the star arose on the manger where he lay cradled, and where as a babe he was reverently worshipped by the sages of the earth, to the hour when the radiant heavens received him into glory, he startles us as much by his words as by his actions and his destiny. A poor man, without family, without property,

without education, he nevertheless claims to have the power to forgive sins. As he sits by the table of the humble mechanic, or sleeps on his rude couch, he says, I am your Creator and Saviour. Reclining by the way-side to rest his weary limbs, the dust from the carriage-wheels of the proud man passing by, is perchance cast over him, and he is looked upon in scorn or not heeded at all; while yet, he is that rich man's final Judge. That sad and expressive sentence, which has since been echoed round the world, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," was literally true of him, and yet he kept the stars in their courses, and had all the angels of heaven at his command. As we see him sitting and eating at the table of the peasant, or stopping at some lowly inn, hungry, weary and slumbrous like other men, we do not wonder it was so hard for either Jew or Gentile to believe in him. But when

we hear the words which fell from his lips—the new truths that so startled the soul of man, we cease to be surprised. A strange, unearthly influence must have surrounded him, a light never before seen, flashed from his eye, to have drawn the crowds that followed him. When he told man he was greater than a king, that God was his father, and bade him push aside the high-priest at the altar, step beyond the very Holy of Holies, and bowing himself before God alone, pour out his sorrows and complaints on his infinite bosom, no wonder a whole world of thought awoke at once in his soul, and a tide of emotions rolled through it, more terrible in its flow than the throb of the earthquake. No wonder that the people hung on his lips, and the multitude thronged about him wherever he went.

It was thus, that once wearied with the press of the crowd, he took his disciples into a ship, and sought a lonely and desert place,

where he might rest and commune with himself and them. But the multitude were not so easily shaken off; the hungry soul was but half satisfied, and hundreds of lame and sick were yet to be healed.

Behold that solitary bark on the placid deep, wafting onward the weary, thoughtful Son of God. The waves are scarcely stirred by the summer wind; the sunlight glitters on the sparkling waters; and save the dip of the oar, the leap of a playful fish, or the scream of the wild-bird after its prey, not a sound breaks the solitude of the scene. But as Jesus casts his eye over the broad bosom of the sea, he perceives at a glance that no seclusion or rest awaits him; for the distant beach is crowded with men and women watching the progress of that frail bark as though it carried their destiny. Litters on which the sick are stretched, cripples struggling along, blind men groping their toilsome way by the sound of rushing footsteps, the

wretched of every description help to swell the throng that line the sea-shore, and endeavor to keep pace with the vessel that bears Jesus of Nazareth on.

Oh! how his heart swelled as he saw the coast black with human beings who would not lose him from their sight. Solitude and weariness were both forgotten in the deep love and compassion he bore them.

On swept the vessel to the desert place, and on pressed the crowd to people it with life, and make it echo with their solicitations and prayers. Of the words that were there spoken, and the truths which held that crowd of more than five thousand in such long and breathless attention, nothing has come down to us; but he healed their sick, restored their lame, and melted and consoled the hearts of all. Hour after hour they stood with upturned faces, and drank in the messages of love and kindness, heedless alike of the declining day, and the long journey back to their

homes. What a picturesque scene they presented there on the sloping shore! Above them leaned the Saviour—behind them heaved the sea—far away rose barren mountains, and all around was dreary and wild. Not a house, not a cultivated spot in view—that single bark moored to the shore, the dark throng encircling the Son of God—these were the only objects betokening life amid the universal desolation. And over all, the setting sunbeams were streaming, flooding with light the form of Christ—giving a deeper color to the sea, and throwing into stronger contrast the dark group on the shore. On the stillness of that evening, no sound broke but the voice of the Saviour. Did he point to that wild scene as he once did to the lilies of the valley to enforce his words? Did the encompassing heavens seem to bend nearer as his eye pierced their depths? Did the setting sun blaze up with greater brilliancy before he left the presence of his God?



As the disciples, filled with the same tender sympathy as their Master, watched the multitude, and thought how long and weary was the journey to their homes, they besought him to send them away, before dark, that they might get food to appease their hunger. From the city, the hamlet, the farmhouse, the shop and the hovel, they had come, bringing no supplies with them; and when the excitement by which they were then upheld should subside, faintness and weariness would make them sink by the way. Jesus knew this as well as they, and bade his astonished disciples feed them before they left. Having nothing themselves, they inquired for bread amid the multitude, but sought in vain. Not one out of the five thousand had food, save a poor lad on whom were found "*five barley loaves and two small fishes.*" Whence came this lad, and how happened he there with his basket of bread and two little fishes? Perchance he was

sitting on the shore fishing, to provide food for a lone mother, when the crowd came rushing past him with their eyes bent on the slowly moving vessel in the distance; and snatching up his basket, he followed after to see what it all meant. He was doubtless led by curiosity alone, and deemed himself unnoticed in the throng. But his basket was taken from him, and he led trembling into the presence of the Saviour, who having commanded the mass to separate itself into groups and companies, and sit down on the grass, took the five barley loaves, and giving thanks, broke them before the people. Each of the five thousand received what he wished, and yet the loaves did not waste, nor the fish diminish. At first it seemed a farce to distribute that immense throng into bands of fifties, and in their presence commence dividing the mere pittance, but wonder and awe soon usurped the place of every other feeling.

As night began to come down on the sea,

Christ dismissed the multitude to their homes. Following him from afar—bound as by a spell in his presence, they involuntarily obeyed his bidding, conscious only of being under the influence of a superior power.

The scene is now changed. That multitude is merely a black speck on the far winding shore. The hum of their subdued voices as they talk of what they have heard and witnessed, and the sound of their footsteps have long since died away. Even that solitary vessel is gone, and is rising and falling on the steady swell, far out upon the water. The disciples are on deck, watching with straining eyes the fast fading form of their Master on shore. He is once more alone with the night. Oh who can tell the sadness that then stole over his human soul! The far hastening multitude, the distant tossing vessel were forgotten in the mightier, more fearful events before him. The thickening shadows of night were not darker than the

forebodings that gathered around his spirit. The moan of the deep, and the solitude of the desert scene, were in harmony with the feelings that oppressed him, and he turned his footsteps towards a lonely mountain to pray. Kneeling under the open sky, he unburdened his heart to his Father in heaven. What words of anguish and sadness startled the night air, what sweet submission and tender sympathy succeeded both, we shall never in this world know. It was a secret and hallowed interview; but while it continued, a far different scene was passing on the sea below him. Dark thunderclouds were hovering over its bosom—the wind swept by in angry gusts, lashing it into fury; and amid the boiling waters that frail bark was struggling desperately for life. By the flashes that ever and anon rent the gloom, its plunging form was seen dividing the sea, as the wild wind and wilder waves hurled it along the distracted deep. Jesus, who had arisen from

prayer, and slowly, thoughtfully retraced his steps to the shore, now stood and looked on the turbulent scene, and his heart was moved for his terror-stricken followers, whom he knew to be in despair on deck. He then calmly, serenely stepped on the crest of the billows, as they rolled and crumbled at his feet, and moved out upon the watery waste. Around him the leaping billows crouched like fawning lions—the lightning slept harmlessly along his forehead, and the thunder stopped “mid-volley” as he passed. Though foam and cloud and tempest were spread around “thy form, thou Son of God,”

“And the heavy night hung dark,  
 Yet like a spirit in thy gliding tread,  
 Thou, as o’er glass, didst walk that stormy sea,  
 Through rushing winds, which left a silent path for thee.

“So still thy white robes fell—no breath of air  
 Within their long and slumberous folds had sway,  
 So still the waves of parted shadowy hair

From thy clear brow flowed droopingly away !  
Dark were the heavens above thee, Saviour !—dark  
The gulfs, Deliverer ! round the straining bark !  
But thou ! o'er all thine aspect and array  
Was poured one stream of pale, broad, silvery light :  
Thou wert the single star of that all-shrouding night."

Oh what a spectacle that self-illuminated and gliding form must have presented to the alarmed disciples on deck. No wonder they cried out "*It is a spirit,*" and turned from the messenger of doom to the wrathful deep around them. But when that calm and gentle voice, heard in its lowest accents above the loud sea, "*It is I, be not afraid,*" fell on their ears, despair and horror gave way to the wildest joy, and Peter, carried away by the sudden excitement, leaped into the surge to meet his Lord.

As the Saviour stepped on deck, a sudden calm fell on the deep—the wind sunk to a whisper, and the waves gently rocked themselves to rest. And when the morning sun

flashed over the hills of Galilee, that solitary vessel seemed in the golden beams, to be gliding over a sea of glass.

## XVI.

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### THE TOMB OF CHRIST.

WHILE Jesus of Nazareth lived, nothing seemed able to subdue the malice of his foes. The less cause he gave for their hatred the greater it became. If he had been guilty of the charges brought against him, they would of course have put him to death; while the vindication of his innocence only strengthened and quickened their bloody purpose. He sought no man's gold or silver—he inflicted no evil, but poor and self-denying, devoted all his time and efforts to the benefit of others; yet his conduct did not soften the hearts of his enemies. When the band of soldiers came upon him on Mount Olivet, the ghastly



and blood-streaked face, utter exhaustion and lonely condition of the sufferer, awoke no commiseration. Though he stood in the judgment hall of Pilate like a "lamb before his shearers," his gentle aspect could not prevent the rude buffet, nor his sacred face from being spit upon. His meek obedience could not save his back from the whip, nor his kind forgiving look keep the thorns from his temples. His hard fate could not find a sympathetic chord in the bosoms of those who sought his life; and when he fainted under the cross, they were only fearful lest the overtaxed frame should give out before they had inflicted on it greater torture. His unutterable agony—even the "*Father, forgive them,*" which has since thrilled the heart of the world, awoke no remorse in their hearts. They clamored more fiercely for *his* life, who was praying for them and theirs, than for the thief's by his side. Through the hands opened only to bless, they smote the nails,

and on the agony borne solely for their redemption, they railed in mockery. And even after death they drove the spear into his side, though the silent language he uttered to them was, "*There is an easier and better way to my heart than by the spear.*"

All this did not move them; but at last malice and hate had done their worst. They had been allowed to insult, to torture, and finally to slay, and there was nothing more for them to do. The victim was beyond their reach, and so with ribald songs and shouts they moved away, and left the dead Christ hanging on the cross.

But a wealthy counsellor who had secretly loved Jesus, went to Pilate and begged the body. Sadly and silently he took it down, and laid it in a new tomb. He and Nicodemus bending over the lifeless form—paying the last sad tokens of respect to him they loved, composing the limbs decently for the grave, is a sight that not

only soothes but startles us. *For the grave* they are preparing him—do they really think, then, that he is dead for ever—that nothing but the Archangel's trump will awaken him again

*He is dead*, and the stillness of night has settled on his lonely sepulchre in the garden. A rock closes the entrance and the great drama is over. Sad, sad is the fate of the little band of Christians. They have forsaken friends and home—endured privations, abuse, and torture, and now stand the objects of universal scorn for their attachment to one who has left them nothing but his tomb. Wanderers on the wide earth, they are like “sheep without a shepherd.” The form they worshipped is wrapped in the shroud, the lips on which they hung in tears of rapture, are sealed in death. The hope of the world is vanished, the light that was rising on its darkness quenched forever; for in that grave, cold and dead, rests the body of him who

called himself the "Son of God." The arm that claimed to uphold the universe has been stretched upon the cross, and now lies stark and stiff beside its owner, while the tongue that declared that it could, with a word, bring "legions of angels" from on high, is dumb and powerless. Leaning over the dead Lazarus, he, with a simple command had raised him from corruption. The sheeted dead obeyed his call, and the charnel house stirred with living men at his voice, but no motion or life is within *his* sepulchre—darkness covers it. "*He saved others, himself he cannot save.*" Perchance angels were in the same state of uncertainty as men, and the melancholy echo came back from the skies, "Christ is dead; *we are orphans, all orphans.*" The star that shone over the manger of Bethlehem was a mockery. The sun shrouding itself in darkness, and the earthquake rending the globe, both attested how dire, how irremediable was the calamity.

The long expected Messiah—the King of Israel is no more. A whole day has he lain in the tomb; soon dust will begin to crumble back to dust—and now night has again fallen on the world. The stars are gently twinkling in the sky—the evening wind sweeps carelessly by—the hum of the distant town is gradually dying away, and all nature moves on as peacefully as though Christ were not dead. The branches are swaying, and the flowers nodding around that quiet grave, and one cannot dream of the scene that will transpire there before the morning dawns. Nothing uncommon marks the hour or the place, save that Roman sentinels are there with the starlight flashing on their steel helmets, and polished spears. The clank of their armor is heard at intervals in the stillness—all else rests undisturbed as the sleeping world around. 'Tis midnight, and the moon, perchance, is already hanging over the western hills,

when suddenly darkness wraps the shuddering earth. The ground begins to heave beneath that sepulchre, and lo! an earthquake thunders on. Rocks are rent, graves open, and the re-animated dead come forth and gaze once more on the heavens. In the midst of this elemental war, and commotion, and gloom, a form clad in vesture white as snow, and with a countenance that outflashes the lightning is seen cleaving the darkness. The throbbing earth and troubled heavens are forgotten before his burning presence, and the sentinels fall as dead men at the door of the sepulchre they are guarding. He rolls back the stone and Jesus of Nazareth stands erect before him. The sleeper has conquered death and the grave, and leaving behind the garments that wrapped him, steps forth into the night. But the place in which he has lain is still held sacred, for two angels clad in white sit, one at the head the other at the foot of the tomb, watching. The earth has

slept, but Heaven been wakeful on this fearful night.

The armed soldiers fallen on their faces— an angel sitting on the stone rolled back from the door—two celestial beings leaning over the tomb within—these were the objects that met the gaze at early dawn. What a scene for that quiet garden. On that night and on that spot were secured the resurrection of the body as well as the redemption of the soul. No wonder angels leaned thoughtfully there. How strange must the spectacle have appeared to Mary Magdalen. The penitent's heart still yearned towards her forgiving Lord. She had stood near the cross and seen him die—she had discovered the place of his burial, and lingered long and anxiously about it. Before the day dawned she had risen from her sleepless couch, and stolen out in the darkness to weep there. Scornful eyes could no longer watch her—no voice reproach her—even the Roman soldiers would respect

so great a sorrow, and not deny her the poor boon of weeping on the spot where her Lord was entombed. With a heart bursting with grief, and perhaps a strange, undefined hope in her breast, she threaded her way through the garden to the sepulchre. Perhaps the rumbling of the earthquake, so like that which closed the crucifixion scene, had roused her before day, and she expected some new manifestation from heaven. If so, she was not disappointed—the open sepulchre with a strange, bright being near the door—two angels within, sitting by the empty tomb—the risen Saviour standing before her—the lifeless sentinels in the midst, might well confuse her senses so that she did not recognize her Lord until he spoke.

The wonderful news soon spread on every side, and Peter, ever impulsive and headlong, came with the speed of wind to ascertain the truth. The sepulchre was open, and though the tomb was there, and the grave clothes



were folded upon it, yet the inmate was gone and the angels had departed. It was a deserted sepulchre, and the solitude and mystery that wrapped it, must have fallen with strange power on the heart of Peter.

How rapidly events had followed each other. The betrayal, trial and crucifixion preceded but a few hours the burial—in a few hours more the dead awoke and moved about among his friends. A few days passed away, and the dead, buried and risen Saviour ascended the heavens. Now the Christian may go back to that grave, around which he wept unavailing tears, and smile in rapture. Its darkness has turned into day, and its solemn depths are filled with angelic voices singing the "*resurrection and the life.*"

Centuries rolled by, and that tomb became a ruin amid ruins. The infidel sneered at the poor pilgrim as he knelt beside it in tears, and chased him away with the lash. Years passed away, and Europe awoke as from a

dream at the insult heaped upon the sepulchre of the Saviour. At the preaching of Peter the Hermit, Christendom was moved as it never before had been. A crusade was set on foot to redeem that sepulchre, and in one year six millions of souls had volunteered for the Holy War. Old men, women and children—the rich and poor were seen streaming by tens of thousands towards the sacred spot. Kings and princes, and warriors of renown buried their feuds, forgot their career of worldly glory, and striking hands together, swore that the sword should never return to the scabbard till the tomb of Christ was delivered from the hands of the infidels. One desire animated every heart, one purpose filled every bosom—the contagion spread from house to house and kingdom to kingdom—“it became an enthusiasm, a passion, a madness.”

Nearly a quarter of a million fell on the very threshold of the undertaking, yet an

army of six hundred thousand men at length stood in gorgeous array on the plains of Asia, and with waving banners and pealing trumpets, began to hew their way to the tomb of Christ. Carried off by famine, pestilence and the sword, till but half of their number was left, they still pressed on towards Jerusalem.

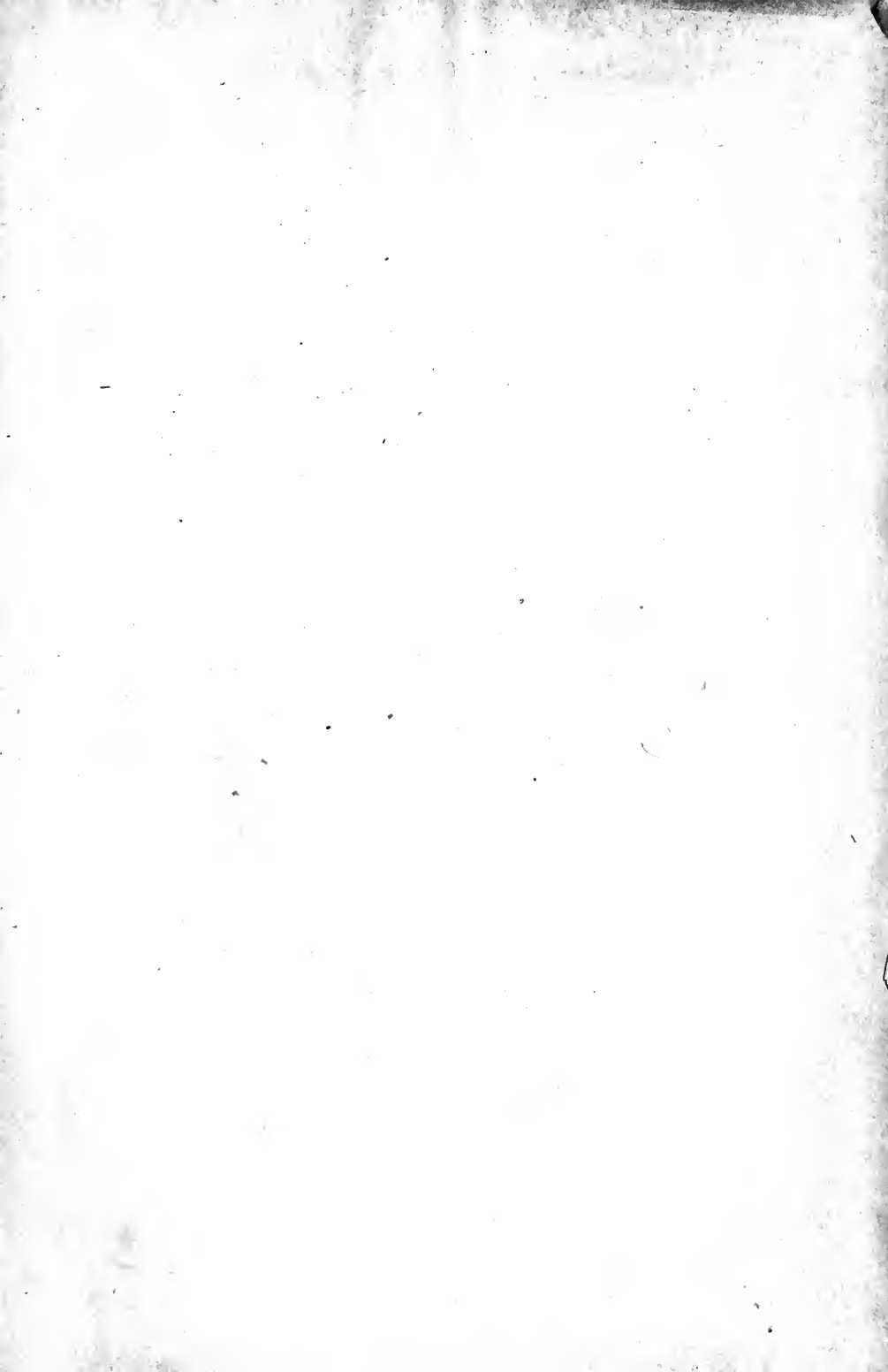
Behold them at length approaching Bethlehem. A deputation of Christians go forth to meet them, and in a moment that weary, wasted army is moved like the forest by a sudden wind. *Bethlehem* is before them, the place where the Saviour was born. The name awoke a thousand touching associations, and thrilled every heart with a strange rapture. That night the excited host could not sleep, and at midnight took up their line of march for Jerusalem. In dead silence—many with bare feet and heads uncovered—pressed tremblingly on through the darkness. At length, the sun, with that suddenness

which always accompanies an eastern dawn, rushed into the heavens, and there lay Jerusalem before them. The object of all their toils; that for which they had endured famine and pestilence, had been mowed down by the sword of the infidel; the one bright goal of their lives, was smiling in summer beauty, at their feet. There was Mount Olivet, there Mount Calvary, and there, too, the sepulchre of the Saviour. Oh, who can describe the emotions that then swept through that Christian host. Some knelt down and prayed, others leaped, shouting, into the air; the mailed knight sobbed like an infant,—until at length arose the murmur, “Jerusalem,” at first faint and low, like the far off sound of the sea, but gradually swelling to the full-voiced thunder, till “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem,*” filled all the air, and rolled gloriously to the heavens. Then taking fire at the thought that the holy city and sacred tomb were in the hands of unbelievers, they raised their battle-cry, and

went pouring forward on the walls like the inrolling tide of the sea.

What a spectacle the crusade presented. The old and the young, the sage and the ignorant, the king and the serf, the knight and the recluse, women and children, the pure and the impure, all pressing forward to one goal, the **TOMB OF CHRIST**. The plains of Asia covered with magnificent armies, and on every banner that waved over them, the *Cross of Christ*. Ten thousand knights spurring joyfully to the onset, every lance set in rest for the *honor of Christ*. Across trackless deserts, over rugged mountains and bloody battle-fields, through disease and death; still onward to the *Tomb of Christ*. Angels watched that tomb after the Saviour had left it. Mary worshipped there—the pilgrim for centuries scourged himself before it—the chivalry of Europe battled around it, and the heart of the world still throbs at the mention of its name.

To the Christian it will ever be an object of the deepest interest—not merely because it was consecrated by the form of the Son of God, but because, as he looks on its emptiness, he feels assured of the resurrection of the dead. He who laid there “*is the first fruits of them that sleep.*”



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